JACK'S JOKER:
LOOK WHO'S SMIRKING NOW!

#74

MOVIE CRITIC
JAY BOYAR
AN INNER VIEW OF JACK'S JOKER

MATT GROENING
LIFE IN HELL

MOVIE ARTIST
WILLIAM STOUT
DEAN OF THE DINOSAURS

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

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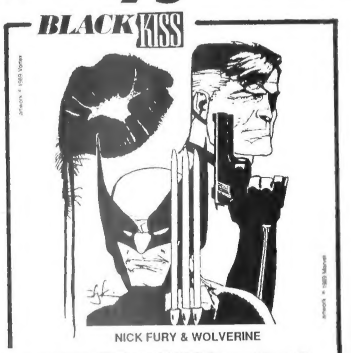

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UP

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FRONT

Movie critic Jay Boyar served a stint in the Marvel Bullpen, back in the mid-'70s, in what surely must seem another lifetime. He brings a broad critical perspective of movie history and memorable film performances to his work — and while he is not of the comics world, unlike a great many others outside our field, he is not altogether unfamiliar with the customs and conventions of comics. This, I think, enables him to bring a unique perspective to a topic that has been the subject of debate, especially in comics circles — actor Jack Nicholson's portrayal of the Joker, which many feel went too far . . . "over the top." Thanks to THE ORLANDO SENTINEL, I am able to share this "inner view" of Jack's Joker with readers of COMICS INTERVIEW.

— DAK

I'm only laughing on the outside,
My smile is just skin deep.
If you could see inside I'm really crying.
You might join me for a weep.
— The Joker's poem in BATMAN

Jack Nicholson's smirk is his greatest creation, a masterpiece that says a mouthful. Its humor rivals Groucho's leer; its hostility challenges Eastwood's squint. His shark's smile tells the world, "I know your dirtiest dirty secrets and they make me laugh. But wait — just wait — until you hear mine!"

Nicholson smirks a bit early in BATMAN, but after his character, mobster Jack Napier, falls into a vat of chemicals and becomes the Joker, the smirk is replaced by a fiendish fixed grin. This hideous smile (which is achieved with prosthetics) drastically distorts the shape of the actor's face.

"Jack is dead, my friend," announces the villain. "You can call me Joker." And though the remark refers to Jack Napier, it seems to include **Nicholson,** too.

As the Joker, **Nicholson** still has the flat, vaguely menacing voice that makes him sound like **Henry Fonda's** evil twin. He still has crazy eyes. But with his expressive mouth hardened into the Joker's grin, **Nicholson** gives an almost abstract prformance, a flamboyant turn that's like a caricature of all he is.

With the Joker's bright green hair, chalk-white skin and unchanging smile, **Nicholson** doesn't look like **Nicholson.** And yet, in BATMAN, he may be more himself than ever.

Like the Joker (and other characters he has played), **Jack Nicholson** has led a fairly bizarre life. It began on April 22, 1937, in Neptune, NJ, and has included acting in several exploitation flicks, co-producing a **Monkees** movie called HEAD (1968), appearing on TV's DIVORCE COURT, starring in an Italian art film called THE PASSENGER (1975), using drugs recreationally, having numerous romantic affairs and, for the past 15 years or so, courting the elusive **Anjelica Huston.**

"He's tried to live as normally as possible, under the circumstances," observes **Sandy Bresler,** his friend and agent for three decades. "Your public life becomes a very tough thing to deal with."

Possibly the most normal thing about **Nicholson's** current life is his keen interest in the **Los Angeles Lakers,** whose basketball games he attends with a true fan's devotion. Undoubtedly the strangest thing about **Nicholson's** personal

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history is the fact that two of the women who raised him were not who he thought they were at the time.

Until his mother's death in 1975, he was under the misimpression that she was his sister and that his grandmother was his mother. Precisely what effect the truth may have had on him isn't known, but it must have been profound.

By no stretch of the imagination was **Nicholson** the artist an overnight success. He moved to Hollywood in 1954 and entered show business as an office boy in MGM's cartoon department. Soon he enrolled in acting classes where he met **John Herman Shaner** who, with him, created a performing space called the Store Theater.

"We both liked fun," recalls **Shaner,** who is now mainly a writer and producer, and who remains close with **Nicholson.** "We liked to kid around, and we had a kind of friendly/benign point-of-view about life . . . There's a hedonist part of him: He likes women, he likes sex and he likes life."

In the '50s, **Nicholson** appeared on stage and in television soap operas. His first feature-film appearance was in THE CRYBABY KILLER (1958) as a juvenile delinquent who panics when he thinks he's committed murder. The movie, a cheapie from the factory of B-movie king **Roger Corman,** led to work in such other exploitation pictures as THE WILD KIDS (1960), THE RAVEN (1963) and HELL'S ANGELS ON WHEELS (1967).

During this eccentric apprenticeship, **Nicholson's** most memorable role was a bit part as the masochistic Wilbur Force in a cult film called THE LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS (1960): Wilbur giggles as he reads a PAIN magazine and shrieks with glee during an excruciating dental visit. After most of his teeth have been needlessly yanked — and his smile destroyed — he merrily announces, "I can truly say I've never enjoyed myself so much."

Perhaps **Nicholson's** performance in this small part is still talked about because the pain-obsessed character touched a nerve deep within the actor.

Jack Nicholson is now a culture hero, "the model for other people to aspire to" and "the radar of the race," as **Shaner** puts it. Still, it isn't hard to imagine that **Nicholson** might have found his place as a minor figure in movies, a reliable character actor who always outshines the star but never quite becomes one. In fact, even since achieving stardom, he hasn't been afraid to take supporting roles and cameos in such films as BROADCAST NEWS (1987), TERMS OF ENDEARMENT (1983), REDS (1981), THE LAST TYCOON (1976) and TOMMY (1975).

"He's always wanted to be a character actor," explains filmmaker **Henry Jaglom,** a longtime **Nicholson** friend who directed SAID (1971). "He's handsome and charming and keeps getting thrown into leading-man roles. But if you look at them, they all have an edge to them."

The movie that rescued **Nicholson** from exploitation-picture purgatory and launched him into superstar heaven was EASY RIDER (1969). This landmark film, which helped to define the counterculture of the '60s (and early '70s), starred **Peter Fonda** and **Dennis Hopper** as Wyatt and Billy, two motorcycle-riding hippies who take to the road to discover America. **Nicholson** played George Hanson, a civil-liberties lawyer whom Wyatt and Billy meet in the jail of a small Southern town.

Nicholson's character is impressive (and hilarious) partly because he's an outsider. George doesn't fit comfortably within the polite society into which he was born, but he's also just a little too square to really be a part of the youth culture that Wyatt and Billy represent. Still, he's in philosophical agreement with these easy riders, and he realizes that, like him, they're out to raise a little hell and have a good time.

"A bridging character" is how **Nicholson** has described George Hanson, and the term also fits the many foot-in-two-worlds figures that he has played over the years. For not only did EASY RIDER make **Nicholson** internationally famous, it helped to establish his star persona. Through EASY RIDER, **Nicholson** became the archetypal hedonist, the rebel within the Establishment, and, of course, the man with the killer smile.

What's most important about George Hanson is that, despite his easygoing exterior, he's a man in pain. And when George is beaten to death with axe handles midway through the film, that pain is manifest. Virtually every role **Jack Nicholson** has played since then has had a tormented quality which — by all

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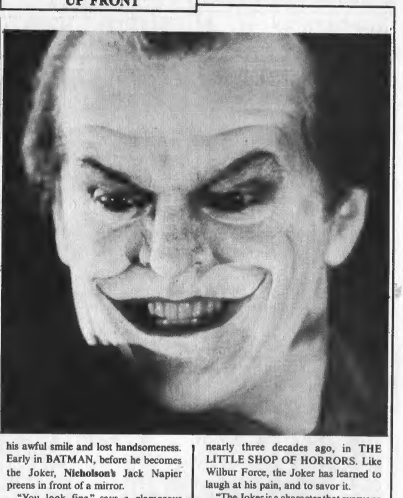


accounts — is a reflection of the true **Nicholson.**

"You really get to know who he is through his work," observes **Jaglom.** "He is the definitive late-20th-Century actor because of that hurt, that dark existential pain."

"He's evolved through struggle," notes **Shaner** (who, incidentally, played the dentist in THE LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS and plays a mover in **Nicholson's** next movie). "The essence of what he really is is a very comical, warm guy who has had to go through a circle of fire. It's seared him, it's burnt him."

In a few of **Nicholson's** most notable roles, this pain of his is submerged. We have only a vague understanding of the agonies of his rowdy sailor in THE LAST DETAIL (1973) and his philandering husband of HEARTBURN (1986).

In other roles, his characters' miseries have been more obvious. Think of the failed pianist (who breaks down and cries) in FIVE EASY PIECES (1970), driven-to-insanity father in THE SHINING (1980), the hit-man loser in PRIZZI'S HONOR (1983), the tragic drifter in IRONWEED (1987),and bitter misogynist in CARNAL KNOWLEDGE (1971). Even as the Devil in THE WITCHES OF EASTWICK (1987), he is at least as bedeviled as anyone else. And in CHINATOWN (1974), when a hood's knife slits the nose of the gumshoe he plays, his pain spills onto the screen.

Randall P. McMurphy — the not-necessarily-crazy inmate of a mental institution in ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST (1975) — was one of **Nicholson's** most jocular roles, but also one in which, as a mental patient, his emotional turmoil was especially apparent. McMurphy was the perfect character to bring together the various threads of **Nicholson's** work to that point in his career and to clarify his image for the moviegoing public. His reward for superbly playing the part was an Academy Award, and his acceptance speech was vintage **Nicholson.**

"I guess," he said, only half-jokingly, "this proves there are many nuts in the academy as anywhere else."

"Over the top" is a phrase that has been widely used to describe **Jack Nicholson's** performance in BATMAN. This usually pejorative phrase suggests that an actor has gone further than is wise.

As the Joker, **Nicholson** does go over the top — way over the top. But he also gets under our skins by revealing something about his character and himself. The Joker's pain is right on the surface, in his awful smile and lost handsomeness. Early in BATMAN, before he becomes the Joker, **Nicholson's** Jack Napier preens in front of a mirror.

"You look fine," says a glamorous woman admiringly, as she places a hand on his shoulder.

"I didn't ask," snarls Napier, shrugging off her hand. A man so vain would be completely undone by losing his looks. He would feel as if he'd died, which the Joker does indeed.

How else do you play a man who considers himself to be dead except to go over the top? In a performance that includes summoning up gales of demonic laughter, dancing like a lunatic, trashing an art museum, telling deliberately bad jokes, reciting sentimental poetry and electrocuting an enemy with a deadly joy buzzer, **Nicholson** does some amazingly self-aware and revelatory work.

"Wait'll they get a load of me," sneers the Joker, and it might as well be **Nicholson** challenging his critics: His performance is an ironic answer to those who have tried to dismiss his talent by saying that his smirk is all there is to it. In playing a character with a hideous fixed smile, **Nicholson** simultaneously calls attention to his expressive mouth and shows that he's just as brilliant when it's frozen, out-of-commission.

The performance can also be seen as an extension of **Nicholson's** telling role, nearly three decades ago, in THE LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS. Like Wilbur Force, the Joker has learned to laugh at his pain, and to savor it.

"The Joker is a character that everyone said he'd be perfect for," explains **Bresler.** "He's that kind of off-the-wall guy."

"I'd like to win more Oscars than **Walt Disney,**" crowed **Nicholson** in 1984, "and I'd like to win them in every category." Having won in the best-actor ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST) and supporting-actor (TERMS OF ENDEARMENT) slots, the next category could be directing.

"His goal," says **Jaglom,** "was always to direct."

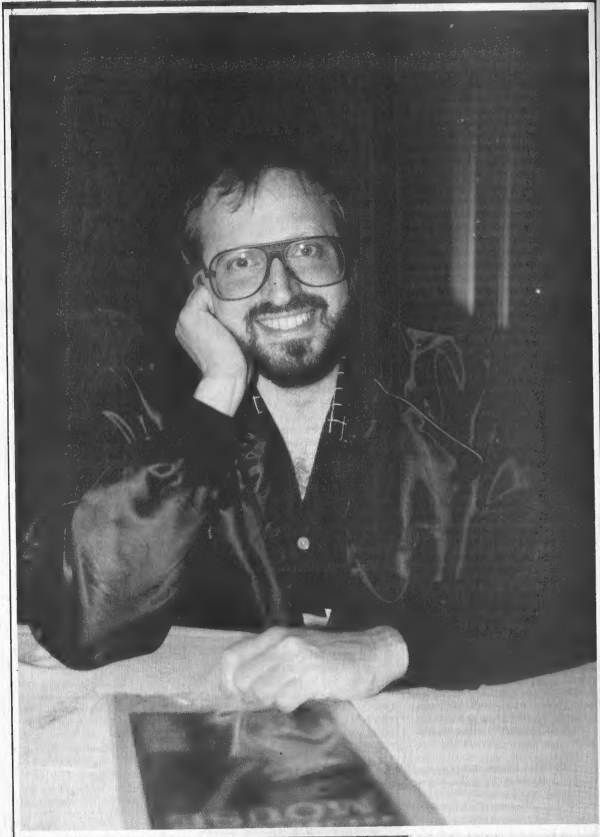
Nicholson has directed just two movies so far: the cultish failure DRIVE, HE SAID and the comedy failure GOIN' SOUTH (1978). His third try will be TWO JAKES, a sequel to CHINATOWN in which he'll also reprise the role of private eye J.J. "Jake" Gittes.

The new project, which is scheduled for a Christmas release, could re-start his stalled directorial career of — if it's his third strike — mark a painful end to it. For **Jack Nicholson,** this is a win-win situation: Either he succeeds as a director, or he endures more pain, which he can use as an actor.

Whatever happens, **Nicholson** is sure to come up smiling.

— Jay Boyar

"Bob Kane came in with an idea —



and everyone else made it a success."

MARV WOLFMAN

Marv Wolfman is a name familiar to any comic-book reader. Known for long runs on titles such as TOMB OF DRACULA and FANTASTIC FOUR, he's also acclaimed for feats such as re-building the Teen Titans, Lex Luthor and Dick Grayson, as well as skragging Supergirl. Setting his sights on BATMAN, he tells COMICS INTERVIEW his plans for the Dark Knight as he takes over the book in its 30th year.

PAT JANKIEWICZ: *Was BATMAN: YEAR THREE hard to put together?*

MARV WOLFMAN: Yeah! It was very difficult because they wanted a story in the present *and* in the past, and they wanted several things to happen in the stories. Fortunately, Batman editor **Denny O'Neil** and I got along very well.

Denny had a lot of good ideas. I presented an overview concept once they suggested what they wanted, and they gave me a whole bunch of things to do that needed to be put into the story. That's what makes it both difficult and interesting — trying to figure out how to put in six elements that may not seem to fit that well.

I presented an overview to Denny, he wrote a three-page memo back to me making suggestions and alterations, and we did it!

PAT: *Do you have a favorite scene in BATMAN: YEAR THREE that encompasses your work?*

MARV: There's a lot of nice things between Dick and Bruce in the later chapters, where the characters are motivating the entire storyline, rather than the plot motivating the characters. That's what I liked. You saw that in the second, third and fourth parts, where the two actually meet.

PAT: *What did Bob Kane and DC think when you broke up the Batman and Robin/ Bruce Wayne and Dick Grayson team?*

MARV: I don't even think **Bob Kane** ever knew that we did. God knows the last time he read an issue of BATMAN, probably the last time he worked on an issue of BATMAN . . . 1939! *(Laughter.)* That's being facetious — probably true, but facetious.

PAT: *You're a Jerry Robinson fan, eh?*

MARV: No, **Bob Kane** came in with an idea and everyone else made it into a great success. He acknowledges that in interviews, too.

As far as the rest of DC, we all sat down and thought it was the best way to handle the situation back then. Dick Grayson had become too important to the Titans to let him leave there, and they wanted a Robin back in BATMAN, so I proposed the idea that we just change Grayson's superhero identity and give them a new kid as Robin.

It worked out very well for me, because eight years later they killed the new kid and I get to write the book! *(Laughter.)*

PAT: *What did you think of the Robin/"Death in the Family" story?*

MARV: I didn't think it was that good a story. I had nothing to do with it, and from a reader's standpoint, I didn't particularly like Jason Todd, so I really don't care what happened to him, one way or another.

PAT: *Will you be bringing Robin back?*

MARV: I'm sorry, but I can't say anything about Robin.

PAT: *You can't, but Warner Brothers has announced that there will be a brand-new Robin by year's end! When certain writers take over the book, they give Batman a certain personality. What will your Batman be like?*

MARV: I'm hoping *not* to give him a certain personality. My view of Batman, I hope, is one **Denny O'Neil** as editor would like: Someone very obsessed, but not crazy.

PAT: *Will Batman lighten up?*

MARV: Well, he still has the death of Jason Todd to deal with and that's not easy for him. So, he's not gonna pick up babies and kiss them! *(Laughter.)* But Bruce and Dick will be closer than they were in the last two years.

PAT: *What supporting characters will you be bringing back?*

MARV: I'm coming up with a whole lot of new characters, and I'm going to bring back anyone from the supporting cast. I like Alfred an awful lot and will use him quite a bit. Lucius Fox, Bruce Wayne's accountant, last seen in 1981, is coming back. Lucius runs Wayne Enterprises' corporate staff.

Whenever I do a story using Wayne Enterprises or Waynetech, he will be in it, but he won't be in every issue. Dick Grayson will be in and out, but won't play a major part.

PAT: *How about villains?*

MARV: Two-Face will be back, then the KGBeast. Denny asked me to pick up the KGBeast storyline, but I can't say what happens because I haven't plotted it yet. After that, probably Poison Ivy. I've also

"Batman under Denny (O'Neil) has

got a new villain called Crimesmith . . . Other people hire the Crimesmith to work out their plans for them. Since I've just begun the book, I have no idea who else I'll create, but Crimesmith's the first one.

PAT: *Did you enjoy the BATMAN movie?*

MARV: I liked it very much! I just wrote a scene into BATMAN that was obviously influenced by the movie, because I enjoyed a lot of it. Like the way the SUPERMAN movie was done, I would prefer to see some of the **Chris Reeve**-style Superman and Clark Kent in the book.

PAT: *Now that the movie has made them popular again, will you be using the Bat-gadgets?*

MARV: Right in my first issue, before I knew what the movie was about, I used the Batcopter. I like those things, but I think it's up to the individual writer. I would have used the Bat-plane because we're doing a story set in Russia. I don't know if I'll use it to get him to Russia, but I certainly like to use those things. I would have used them whether or not the movie existed.

PAT: *So DC's not leaning on you, "Marv, put the Batwing in the book, or else?"*

MARV: No, not a thing. In fact, in no way, shape or form have they done anything to indicate any way of handling Batman. We're going to do the Batman that was done beforehand, that under Denny, has been going up and up in sales before the movie had anything to do with it.

PAT: *How about Vicki Vale?*

MARV: Again, she was a character who probably would have been brought back from the beginning. Just because I liked her character in the '50s. I think the Batman book needed some female characters in it. I don't know if Vicki will be used as a love interest, or just a character. That hasn't been talked about.

PAT: *Speaking of female characters, how about Barbara Gordon?*

MARV: I'm gonna talk to Denny about it, because she's a very important part of BATMAN. Also, there's a Barbara Gordon mini-series coming up with another writer and I have no idea where they're going on that, so I can't decide what to do with her.

PAT: *Batman has an uneasy alliance with Superman. Will that be dealt with? How about a Teen Titans cross-over?*

MARV: I assume so, but there are no plans at the moment — the moment being the next six months. Superman and Batman are the only ones currently published that were around when I was a child. I love writing both of them. Titans and Batman will cross on and off. There's a 5-parter that crosses over with the Titans ("A Lonely Place of Dying") and a few months later, there'll be another cross-over.

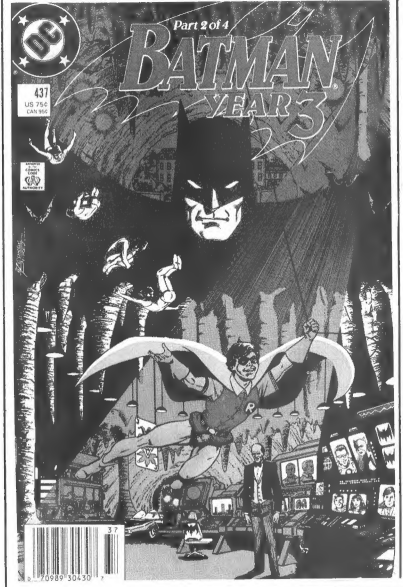
PAT: *Are there any BATMAN writers who have influenced you?*

MARV: Yeah, but all in different ways. Denny was an influence for sheer plotting, his plots move the best. In terms of approach I like **Frank Miller,** especially **Miller's** BATMAN: YEAR ONE. I like a lot of what **Mike Barr** did in BATMAN: YEAR TWO. He introduced a sense of humor with it, without poking fun at the character. So I'm influenced by a lot of things, and especially the 1960s television show! *(Laughter.)*

PAT: *Are any of your works headed toward films?*

MARV: TOMB OF DRACULA was turned into a movie in Japan. They took one of my stories, the last 20 issues of the book, and made it into an animated movie about ten years ago. It was my story, no changes. I was very happy with it. I've got a videotape of it in Japanese. They also released it in English, but it's a horrible translation.

There's a script for a BLADE movie — based on Blade, the Vampire Slayer,



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been going up and up in sales."

from TOMB OF DRACULA - but I don't think it will make it. It was written for New World by **Lee Goldberg** and **Bill Radkin**, the story editors on HUNTER. It took liberties, but it was an okay script. It wasn't the BLADE that I created specifically, but it wasn't far off on a conceptual basis.

I was asked, along with **John Byrne**, to come up with ideas for SUPERMAN IV. We came up with our own plotlines. John came up with several of his, and I with several of mine.

John had his published as a special at DC — SUPERMAN: THE EARTH STEALERS — and since I didn't do anything with mine, I'll wait until I do Superman again. Then I'll let the story be seen for the first time.

PAT: *Did you get along with John Byrne?*

MARV: We never really talked. I live in California and John lives in Connecticut. We almost never discussed anything together, except before we did Superman. **George Perez** lives in New York and I live here, but George and I communicate. We used to live four blocks from each other, so we became really good friends. John and I never lived near each other.

PAT: *Was there any flak from Byrne or DC when you re-invented Luthor?*

MARV: I had originally proposed the idea five years before and everybody thought it wouldn't work. Naturally, what happened was when we decided to re-do Superman, I gave **John Byrne** a call and said, "Here's the way to do Luthor." He liked the idea. So, once somebody like **John Byrne** says it's a good idea, it's accepted.

PAT: *What's been your favorite book?*

MARV: My favorite book to date has been TOMB OF DRACULA, but not because of the material or anything. It's because I learned my craft working on that book, on how to do it, and had the most freedom to do exactly what I wanted. It was fun to learn on that book, and therefore the memories associated with it are very different.

I've done some better work on the TITANS and some other books, but it doesn't have the same learning experience. Most people remember their childhood fondly because they were growing up, even if their childhood was miserable. DRACULA has that same sort of feel, that's why my memories are so fond about that. It was a time when I was still learning and having tons of fun.

PAT: *You mentioned THE NEW TEEN TITANS, Marv. What made you bring back the teen hero concept when it was dead as a doornail?*

MARV: Well, I'd written the TEEN TITANS back in 1969. I'd done a few issues, one issue with **Len Wein**, and really liked the characters. When I left Marvel, I wanted to get a bunch of books at DC and I've always made a practice of trying to create my own books in one fashion or another, and I enjoyed Teen Titans characters. I just wanted to do it again, only bring it with a current sensibility.

PAT: *What's the most explosive thing you've ever done with a character?*

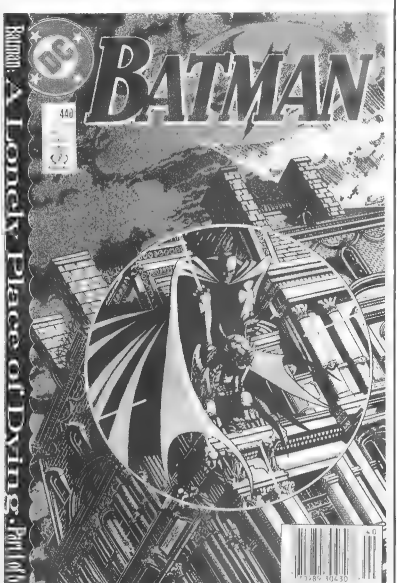
MARV: Killing Supergirl was probably it

It was a very controversial move. People were upset. A lot of people thought it was the best appearance Supergirl ever had. (Laughter.) A lot of people were sorry to see her go. It's still a situation where everybody has their own views of what Supergirl was, so there's no way to please everybody!

The character was going to die and the only thing we wanted to do was make sure the death issue was as well done as we could make it.

PAT: *Great! Upcoming projects?*

MARV: TITANS and BATMAN!



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"Could this incredibly obscure cartoon

MATT GROENING

Photo: Ann Summa

All art accompanying this interview is 1982,86 by Matt Groening, unless otherwise noted

strip support an incredibly goofy T-shirt?"

MARK: *You've been steadily working on the IN HELL projects now for how long?*

MATT: The concept occurred to me on the Hollywood freeway in August of 1977, the minute I arrived in Los Angeles from the Pacific Northwest. *(Laughter.)* And the comic strip LIFE IN HELL started in 1980.

MARK: *How many newspapers are you in?*

MATT: I'm in about 60 right now.

MARK: *The LIFE IS HELL corporation seems to be becoming sort of a cottage industry, with greeting cards and licensing products. What kind of stuff are you branching into?*

MATT: Well, the business is run by my wife, **Deborah Caplan.** It was started almost as a joke, could this incredibly obscure cartoon strip support an incredibly goofy T-shirt — and it actually sold! So I continue to do merchandise. I have misgivings. *(Laughter.)* We do coffee mugs, T-shirts, calendars, posters, greeting cards, postcards. A rubber Binky is in the works, a la Gumby.

MARK: *The first time I came across your work I was living in Appalachia, on top of a mountain in Georgia, and a friend of mine from Atlanta gave me an 8 1/2 x 11 Xerox of the cover for your STRUGGLING ARTIST magazine. I was really blown away by it because it's rare that you come across people who do humor who are really funny and not just banal or stupid or totally absurd. You had a real hitch on reality that made it very funny without going really abstract and also without being sort of dumb. I really got a lot of belly laughs out of it, and since then I have tried to send copies of that to friends of mine when they were feeling down. Where did that come from? Where do you get your humor from?*

MATT: That's inspired by MAD MAGAZINE, all of those fake covers that they did in MAD MAGAZINE which I used to love. I always wanted there to be more than a magazine cover, but really the magazine covers are great because they evoke more than is actually there.

MARK: *What are some of the other titles of your fake magazines?*

MATT: I can't remember. I did a magazine cover called ANNOYING STREET LUNATIC. As far as being funny, for a long time as an amateur I tried to write what I thought would make other people laugh. I tried to *fit* my cartoons into a mold based on other cartoonists. From **Linda Barry** in college I learned to draw what made me laugh, and for me the best humor is humor with a very strong point of view — I take my point of view and I exaggerate it wildly, and try not to condescend to people. I assume that the reader is intelligent. I think that people are delightfully surprised at that. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *What other cartoonist forms were you adapting in those days before Linda turned you on to yourself?*

MATT: Well, I started in the fifth grade trying to draw Batman.

MARK: *A Neal Adams style?*

MATT: Before that.

MARK: *So it might have been Carmine Infantino or —*

MATT: Who was the original guy that drew Batman?

MARK: *Bob Kane.*

MATT: Yeah. I was reading old DCs from back in the 50s and stuff.

MARK: *It wasn't really Bob Kane but it was under the aegis of --*

The Great Spin-Off of the decade???

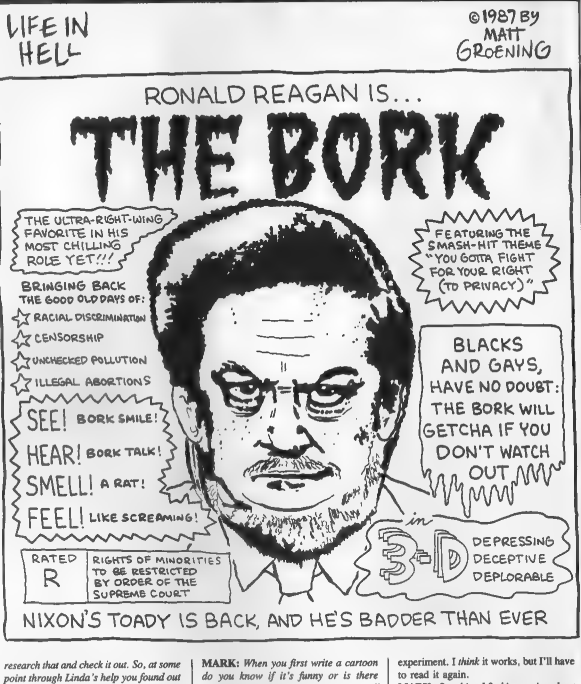
MATT: It *looked* like his stuff. So I drew Batman. My friends and I made up a fake island populated by slugs and we drew comics about the slugs. We established an elaborate mythology and anthropology for this entire little island of slugs. And it moved fast, they weren't sluggish. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *In the pseudo-Batman style of art?*

MATT: No, no. I have these characters Akbar and Jeff with big noses and so on, well the slugs had those heads but with no arms or legs, sort of this blobby, tubular eel body, like fat snakes. By the way, if you want to read more about Sluggonia, my collaborator at the time, **Duncan Smith,** wrote an article about it for SEMIOTEXT(E) magazine, which is French. I don't know what issue it's in.

MARK: *Hopefully our readers will*

"You might as well get on with life


LIFE IN HELL
©1987 BY MATT GROENING
RONALD REAGAN IS...
THE BORK
THE ULTRA-RIGHT-WING FAVORITE IN HIS MOST CHILLING ROLE YET!!!
BRINGING BACK THE GOOD OLD DAYS OF:
RACIAL DISCRIMINATION
CENSORSHIP
UNCHECKED POLLUTION
ILLEGAL ABORTIONS
SEE! BORK SMILE!
HEAR! BORK TALK!
SMELL! A RAT!
FEEL! LIKE SCREAMING!
RATED R
RIGHTS OF MINORITIES TO BE RESTRICTED BY ORDER OF THE SUPREME COURT
FEATURING THE SMASH-HIT THEME "YOU GOTTA FIGHT FOR YOUR RIGHT (TO PRIVACY)"
BLACKS AND GAYS, HAVE NO DOUBT: THE BORK WILL GETCHA IF YOU DON'T WATCH OUT
in 3-D
DEPRESSING
DECEPTIVE
DEPLORABLE
NIXON'S TOADY IS BACK, AND HE'S BADDER THAN EVER

research that and check it out. So, at some point through Linda's help you found out to let go of trying to write cartoons in the style that you thought *people would think were funny and just let yourself write cartoons that you thought were funny.*

MATT: Yes.

MARK: *And that's where you are now and you are developing that?*

MATT: Yeah, that's right. I write to amuse myself, and luckily I've had enough feedback so that I know that it works for other people as well.

MARK: *When you first write a cartoon do you know if it's funny or is there somebody that you have to bounce it off of first?*

MATT: I gamble a lot in that I turn in cartoons that no one else sees. Sometimes I catch myself at four o'clock in the morning and realize correctly that I have completely taken the wrong tack. Sometimes I don't realize it until after I see the cartoon in print. I did a cartoon about **Robert Bork,** there are no rabbits in it, it's just a political cartoon — it's an experiment. I *think* it works, but I'll have to read it again.

MARK: *One thing I find interesting about your work is despite the trappings of cynicism or negativity, underneath it there's a real warm foundation. It's like, "School is hell but we can laugh at it and go on. There's a deeper reality somewhere, this isn't everything."*

MATT: Right.

MARK: *I wonder where you get your optimism from, spiritual beliefs? Is it sort of like good-natured everyday faith*

because it's a better use of your time."

in humanity?

MATT: Um . . . let's see, what *would* it be? *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *Or am I totally off the wall and you think everything is bleak and nihilistic?*

MATT: No. I guess I'm technically an agnostic in that area. My attitude is you might as well get on with life because it's a better use of your time. You know, it's more *fun* to laugh at stuff than it is to be made miserable by it. For a long time I would get angry at a lot of stuff, you know, and when I learned to laugh at it instead of getting upset by it, things felt a lot better. And also it made things I really do get angry about . . . I had more time for important things to be angry about, rather than the mundane stuff. The other thing is that a lot of the stuff that I hated the most I found that I ended up liking. It turned out that some of that stuff wasn't so bad after all. I think that so much verbiage is thrown at us as cultural consumers that we're put in the position of being suspicious and resentful of all of the crummy stuff, and it's hard to get the enthusiasm one needs, you know, to get into the good stuff.

MARK: *What are some of the things that you thought were crummy then that you now think are good?*

MATT: Well, country music I couldn't stand, I thought it was hick redneck garbage, and now I get a kick out of it. A whole lot of musical stuff, I had very definite ideas about what was good and what was bad. Now I am able to listen to almost everything with the exception of French art songs of the 19th century and virtually all rockabilly, which I find abominable. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *It sounds like the adult or judging voice in your head that sometimes maybe made you angry and resentful, you've found a forum through your creativity to release that and you don't have to judge and be angry as much about things, you can sometimes think maybe this is something you could like.*

MATT: Right, yeah, that's it.

MARK: *That diary in SCHOOL IS HELL, is that a real diary?*

MATT: Yes, that is a real diary. That is my diary from the fifth grade; slightly edited, I took out the portions that did not relate to school. Also it stops at the end of school, but the diary continued for a few months after that. I took the fifth grade diary because that year I got in trouble in school so much, unfairly I thought. I wanted to have a record of my miserable time so that I could look back in later life and decide whether or not it was me who was wrong.

MARK: *That sounds unusually aware for a fifth grader, to think in those terms of looking backwards like that.*

MATT: Well, there was a *great* book that I read that year called THE REAL DIARY OF A REAL BOY by **Henry A. Shute.**

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Matt Groening's "The Simpsons" · © 1988 Gracie Films/Fox Network

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"Most torture teachers inflict upon kids is mental."

It's long out of print, a turn of the century book. That was not a real diary, despite its title, but I thought it was real at the time. I didn't decide until years later that it was a fake. *(Laughter.)* But anyway, that inspired me.

MARK: *The parts of your diary that you excised because they don't fit in with school, will we see them at some later date?*

MATT: Actually that was the year when I started collecting comics. I wrote all about SPIDER-MAN and FANTASTIC FOUR and the great comic-book store that I discovered in downtown Portland that sold comics dating back to the 1940s for a quarter each. However, a quarter was a lot of money to a fifth grader in 1965, I didn't buy all that many of them, to my eternal regret. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *When you discovered SPIDER-MAN and all that in fifth grade, had you been drawing before then or did that sort of kindle you?*

MATT: I've been drawing for as long as I can remember. My father was a cartoonist in the very early 1950s. He drew single panel gag cartoons, and then he wised up and moved on to more lucrative stuff.

MARK: *More lucrative cartooning things?*

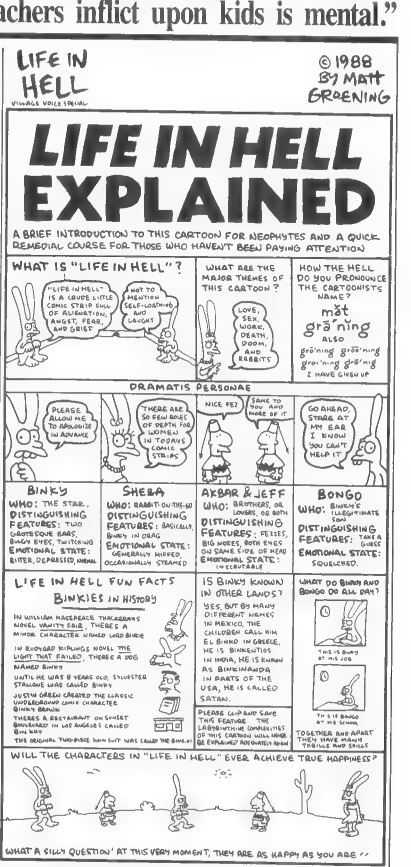
MATT: A totally different field. He figured out, based on the percentage of cartoons that he was selling, that he was not making all that much money per hour, so he went into advertising and filmmaking.

MARK: *One conjectures all sorts of nightmarish scenarios about your childhood from reading your books. I'm sure the reality was probably a lot different than some of the conjectures. Do you care to illuminate us on what your upbringing was like? Did you have a lot of brothers and sisters?*

MATT: I have one brother and three sisters. My childhood was outwardly pretty nice. I grew up in a very nice part of Portland, we lived in a house in the middle of the woods. A half-a-mile in one direction was an abandoned zoo, and in the other direction was a brand new zoo, so I spent my formative years listening to the sounds of elephants trumpeting and lions roaring off in the distance. I ran around over trails and crawled through drainpipes. We used to sneak into the abandoned zoo and swim in the grizzly pools, and play war games at the zoo train — we'd throw dirt clods and stuff at the zoo train. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *Sounds great.*

MATT: Right, it was ideal. There was


LIFE IN HELL
VILLAGE VOICE / SPECIAL
©1988 BY MATT GROENING
LIFE IN HELL EXPLAINED
A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THIS CARTOON FOR NEOPHYTES AND A QUICK REMEDIAL COURSE FOR THOSE WHO HAVEN'T BEEN PAYING ATTENTION
WHAT IS "LIFE IN HELL"?
"LIFE IN HELL" IS A GROVE LITTLE COMIC STRIP FULL OF ALIENATION, ANGST, FEAR, AND GRIEF
NOT TO MENTION SELF-LOATHING AND LAUGHS.
WHAT ARE THE MAJOR THEMES OF THIS CARTOON?
LOVE, SEX, WORK, DEATH, DOOM, AND RABBITS
HOW THE HELL DO YOU PRONOUNCE THE CARTOONIST'S NAME?
mät grö'ning
ALSO groining groining groining groining
I HAVE GIVEN UP
DRAMATIS PERSONAE
PLEASE ALLOW ME TO APOLOGIZE IN ADVANCE
THERE ARE SO FEW AREAS OF DEPTH FOR WOMEN IN TODAYS COMIC STRIPS
NICE PEZ
SAME TO YOU AND MORE OF IT
GO AHEAD, STARE AT MY EAR I KNOW YOU CAN'T HELP IT
BINKY
WHO: THE STAR. DISTINGUISHING FEATURES: TWO GIANT BLOVE EARS, BEADY EYES, TWITCHING EMOTIONAL STATE: BITTER, DEPRESSED, MENTAL
SHEBA
WHO: RABBIT OUTLOOK DISTINGUISHING FEATURES: BASICALLY BUNNY IN DRAG EMOTIONAL STATE: GENERALLY MIFFED, OCCASIONALLY STEAMED
AKBAR & JEFF
WHO: BROTHERS, OR LOVERS, OR BOTH
DISTINGUISHING FEATURES: PETITE, BIG NOSES, TOO EYES ON SAME SIDE OF HEAD
EMOTIONAL STATE: INSCRUTABLE
BONGO
WHO: BINKY'S ILLEGITIMATE SON
DISTINGUISHING FEATURES: TAKE A GUESS
EMOTIONAL STATE: SQUEECHED.
LIFE IN HELL FUN FACTS
IN WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY'S NOVEL VANITY FAIR, THERE'S A MINOR CHARACTER NAMED LORD BINKIE
IN RICHARD WRIGHT'S NOVEL THE LIGHT THAT FAILED, THERE'S A DOG NAMED BUNNY
UNTIL HE WAS 8 YEARS OLD, SYLVESTER STALLONE WAS CALLED BUNNY
JUSTIN GREEN CREATED THE CLASSIC UNDERGROUND COMIX CHARACTER BINNY BROWN
THERE'S A RESTAURANT ON SUNSET BOULEVARD IN LOS ANGELES CALLED BING BING
THE MOVIE TWO-FISTED SOB SUEY WAS CALLED THE BUNNY
IS BINKY KNOWN IN OTHER LANDS?
YES, BUT BY MANY DIFFERENT NAMES. IN MEXICO, THE CHILDREN CALL HIM EL BINKO. IN GREECE, HE IS BINKEUTIES. IN INDIA, HE IS KNOWN AS BINKANANDA. IN PARTS OF THE USA, HE IS CALLED SATAN.
PLEASE CLIP AND SAVE THIS FEATURE. THE LABORIOUS COMPLETION OF THIS CARTOON WILL NEVER BE EXPLAINED ADEQUATELY AGAIN
WHAT DO BINKY AND BONGO DO ALL DAY?
THIS IS BINKY AT HIS JOB
TV'S IT BINGO AT HIS SCHOOL
TOGETHER AND APART THEY HAVE MANY TRIBULATIONS AND SKILLS
WILL THE CHARACTERS IN "LIFE IN HELL" EVER ACHIEVE TRUE HAPPINESS?
WHAT A SILLY QUESTION! AT THIS VERY MOMENT, THEY ARE AS HAPPY AS YOU ARE ~~

"Whether or not the world is ready to

enough ferns and stuff so that we could run fast and escape when they stopped the train and ran after us. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *In the new zoo?*

MATT: Yes, the new zoo. There was a train that ran through the forest from the zoo to the rose gardens, and there was a summer festival every year in the rose gardens.

MARK: *Yeah, I've been there.*

MATT: So you know how nice it is in that area.

MARK: *Yeah, it's beautiful.*

MATT: It's wonderful. School, on the other hand, was quite different, because it was so boring for me. I think any kid who is curious and inquisitive would find the average public school to be a bit on the slow side, and that was certainly the case for me. I spent most of my waking hours drawing surreptitiously while the teacher droned on and on about something, I couldn't remember what. *(Laughter.)* I just *felt* intuitively from a very early age that there was no need for adults to make life so miserable for kids. It seemed unfair that the kids were punished in the ways that they were, and because of my wiseass mouth and my insolent attitudes I certainly got in trouble quite a bit.

MARK: *My experiences were very similar. I was the kid whose desk was out in the hall a lot.*

MATT: Yeah, I got that. God, I forgot about the desk being put out in the hall.

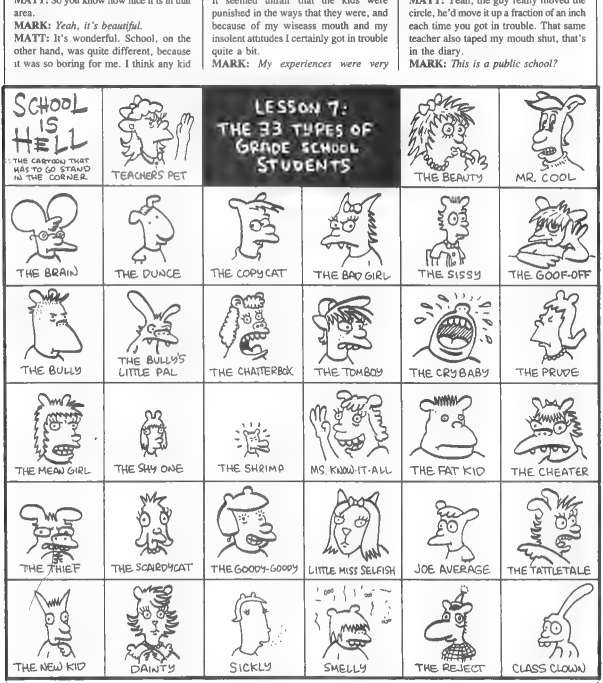
MARK: *Stood in the corners a lot.*

MATT: Standing in the corner, nose on the blackboard. That was a pretty creative form of punishment.

MARK: *We didn't have that. Did they really move the circle?*

MATT: Yeah, the guy really moved the circle, he'd move it up a fraction of an inch each time you got in trouble. That same teacher also taped my mouth shut, that's in the diary.

MARK: *This is a public school?*



see these rabbits on TV, I don't know."

MATT: Yes.
MARK: *This sounds more like a parochial school.*
MATT: Yeah. It was an extreme case. Most torture that teachers inflict upon kids is mental. And I've got to say that not *all* teachers were bad, there were some good ones. My problem with the good ones was that they refused to acknowledge the badness of the bad ones. *(Laughter.)*
MARK: *Have you gone back to the schools where it all began?*
MATT: My old schools?
MARK: *Yeah.*
MATT: No. I think that would make me feel sad. I'm going back to my hometown next week to do a book signing and some media appearances ... and I have a feeling that having written a book called SCHOOL IS HELL that I'm not about to be invited to any of the schools that I went to. But I wouldn't mind going back to my college, Evergreen State College up in Washington, because I love that school.
MARK: *You might be surprised, though, because fame has a way of changing a lot of establishment's views of people; like John Steinbeck living in Monterey and really bringing down the wrath of God after exposing Cannery Row, but now if you go through that part of the country there's the Steinbeck Motel and Steinbeck this. Specifically because you write about the schools, you might find a whole different attitude in the school system than you are expecting.*
MATT: Yeah, I suppose that's possible, if they're not reading it carefully enough. *(Laughter.)*

Here, and below... Matt's LIFE IN HELL strip.

MARK: *How long is it going to be before we see the feature length Binky animation playing in movie houses? Have you any plans to dramatize your stuff?*
MATT: I talk to people on a regular basis about doing my stuff in animated form on television, but so far ...
MARK: *Nothing.*
MATT: Well, things are happening, it's just one of those things —
MARK: *A few nibbles?*
MATT: Yeah. I'm negotiating with people at the moment about doing it. Whether or not the world is ready to see these rabbits on the TV screen, I don't know. You know I *do* animation other than rabbits.
MARK: *You write for animation or do*

LIFE IN HELL
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LIFE IN HELL
©1988 BY MATT GROENING
SO, TELL US WHAT WAS YOUR VISION?
HIS NAME IS BOOGY
WEIRD
CLEVER
AND MY NAME IS
HI! WHAT'S UP?
LET'S GO SURF!
BLOOD?
CHUNKS?
BOOGY?
BOOGY?
BOOGY

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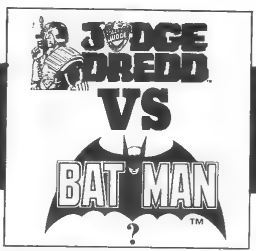

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COMICS INTERVIEW

"I am a writer mainly, I have minimal drafting skills."

you draw?

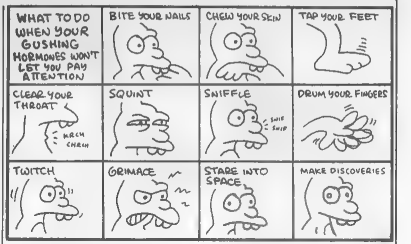
MATT: I draw. I do little animated bumpers — I guess that's what they're called — for THE TRACY ULLMAN SHOW on Fox. That's with entirely different characters.

MARK: *Since I don't watch TV I'm not aware of that stuff.*

MATT: They look like the rabbits except they don't have the large ears. It's a family called the Simpsons — Mom, Dad, Bart, Lisa and Maggie — and, like I said, they look like the rabbits, got the same bulgy eyes and very tragic overbite. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *I've heard people who are into the old school of cartoonists — you know, from the past 20 or 30 years, before people like you and Linda Barry came along — criticize your work with, "Their stuff is alright but if they could only learn how to draw." Have people confronted you with that? What do you think about those kind of comments?*

MATT: Well, they're true. *(Laughter.)* One of the things that's different about the new cartoonist, whom I like and who I'm often grouped with, is that very often they don't define themselves primarily as cartoonists. They do other things, generally writing or, in the case of **Linda Barry,** fine art. Cartooning for them is just another medium of expression. It's not necessarily a career, although it has turned into a career for both Linda and me. I am a writer mainly, that's how I think of myself, and I have minimal drafting skills. I try for clarity despite the huge numbers



of words in my stuff, I do try for a clarity of the design; and readability, except when I get carried away by an idea. *(Laughter.)* I just have to say — I've said this before — many cartoons as far as I'm concerned are over drawn in that the ideas behind the cartoons are so flimsy or nonexistent that looking at the drawing makes me tired.

MARK: *Right, the idea underneath isn't enough to support the weight of this incredible technical stuff.*

MATT: Yeah. My hope is that with my stuff it's —

MARK: *It's almost the opposite.*

MATT: Yes, at least that's what I try for. Another thing, a lot of what cartooning aficionados are after is the mystique of . . . the illusion in draftsmanship. My stuff is definitely anti-mystique, anti-glamorous. *(Laughter.)* I think it's really friendly, in that it's inviting the people in because it looks very close to what somebody would do as a casual doodle. I know that's true because a lot of very bad cartoonists show me their stuff. *(Laughter.)*

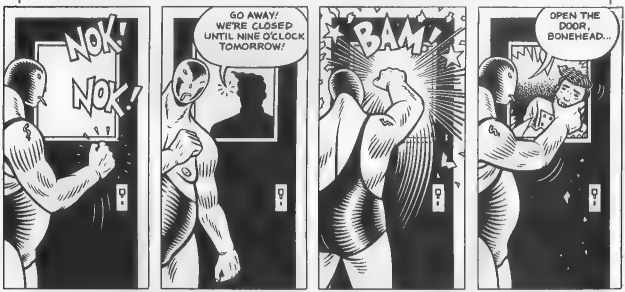
MARK: *And you say, "If you keep getting worse, someday you'll end up like me."*

MATT: That's right. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *So in at least seven years of pretty steadily drawing rabbits and little guys with fezzes on, how have you been able to avoid getting better?*

MATT: *(Voiceless fricative.)* Well . . . I've gotten less worse, let me put it that

Written & drawn by Charles Burns . . . EL BORBAH in action, again!



1983-88 Charles Burns

"I concentrate on the low end of popular culture;

LIFE IN HELL
UNBELIEVABLE.
THE CONTRAS CONTINUING THEIR HOPELESS WAR AGAINST NICARAGUA.
THE FBI SPYING ON AMERICANS SOLELY BECAUSE OF THEIR OPPOSITION TO CENTRAL AMERICAN POLICY.
MORE THAN 2000 PERSONS MURDERED OF DISAPPEARED IN THE LAND
SPENDING BILLIONS ON WEAPONS WHILE CUTTING PROGRAMS FOR EDUCATION, THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE POOR.
AND ED MEESE ISN'T IN JAIL YET.
AND THE PROSPECT, HOWEVER DIM, OF HAVING FOUR MORE YEARS OF REAGAN-STYLE SLEAZINESS UNDER GEORGE BUSH.
WE'RE LIKE THE LITTLE FROG IN THE PAN OF WATER. WHO DOESN'T REALIZE IT'S HUMAN BUT SLOWLY BEING BOILED TO DEATH.
THE POOR LITTLE FROG.
LIFE IN HELL

Photo © 1988 Larry Sklim

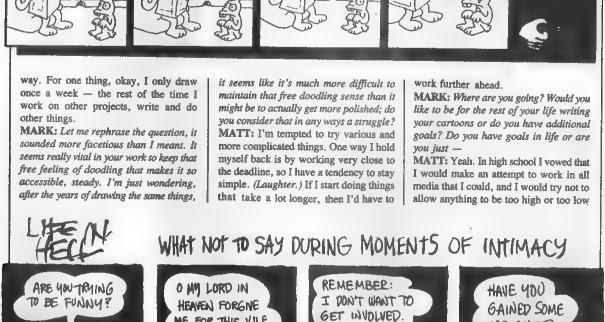
way. For one thing, okay, I only draw once a week — the rest of the time I work on other projects, write and do other things.

MARK: *Let me rephrase the question, it sounded more facetious than I meant. It seems really vital in your work to keep that free feeling of doodling that makes it so accessible, steady. I'm just wondering, after the years of drawing the same things, it seems like it's much more difficult to maintain that free doodling sense than it might be to actually get more polished; do you consider that in any ways a struggle?*

MATT: I'm tempted to try various and more complicated things. One way I hold myself back is by working very close to the deadline, so I have a tendency to stay simple. *(Laughter.)* If I start doing things that take a lot longer, then I'd have to work further ahead.

MARK: *Where are you going? Would you like to be for the rest of your life writing your cartoons or do you have additional goals? Do you have goals in life or are you just —*

MATT: Yeah. In high school I vowed that I would make an attempt to work in all media that I could, and I would try not to allow anything to be too high or too low


LIFE IN HELL
WHAT NOT TO SAY DURING MOMENTS OF INTIMACY
ARE YOU TRYING TO BE FUNNY?
O MY LORD IN HEAVEN FORGIVE ME FOR THIS VILE SIN I AM ABOUT TO COMMIT.
REMEMBER: I DON'T WANT TO GET INVOLVED.
HAVE YOU GAINED SOME WEIGHT?

comics, greeting cards, and, lowest of all, TV."

for me. It's really an extension of playing around, of play. So far I have concentrated on the low end of popular culture. I've drawn comics, I've written rock journalism, I've written greeting cards, and, the lowest of all, I've written for television. But now I would hope I could turn my attention towards more conventional . . . I would turn my attention to fiction in other forms of prose.

MARK: *Short fiction?*

MATT: Yeah, short fiction and novels. I have a novel that I'm doing an outline for right now. And I wrote one a long time ago that was awful, it was called MEAN KIDS.

MARK: *Is the current novel outline on familiar subject matter that we would expect from you or is it something totally different?*

MATT: Well, I hope it's funny. It's inspired by my early poverty stricken days in Los Angeles.

MARK: *Do you want to talk a little bit about the dumpster project?*

MATT: That sounds so smelly when you put it that way. I am putting together a book collecting high school kids' diaries and writings and love letters and fake excuses, made up of material I have collected over the last three years —

MARK: *Annotated or verbatim?*

MATT: It'll be altered enough so that no one will be hurt or embarrassed. But the stuff is *wild*, it's hilarious, crazy, depressing and shocking all at the same time.

MARK: *Will it reproduce the original handwriting or will it be in straight prose form or what?*

MATT: I haven't decided yet. I'm just pulling together the material, I don't know what form it's going to take.

MARK: *Do you see yourself as the editor, or will you write for the book as well?*

MATT: I'll be doing an introductory essay. I saved a bunch of my own stuff and it looks exactly the same, maybe I'll sneak in my own stuff as well. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *And you got all of the material from raiding dumpsters in L.A.?*

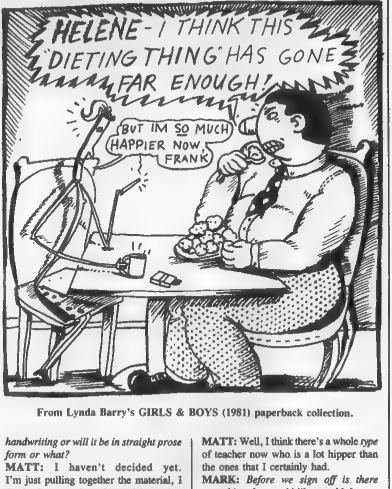
MATT: No . . . I mean yeah, dumpsters were part of it — God, I hate talking about this — but kids toss their stuff all over the place. And teachers have given me stuff, students have given me stuff. In doing research for SCHOOL IS HELL I talked to a number of teachers and students and they turned me on to material that they had no further use for.

MARK: *That's great. It's like the circle of sort of painful childhood completes itself, you go back to the schools and the teachers are helping you now. It's sort of like through your work you've gotten a lot of the stuff that you could have used back then.*

MATT: Well, I think there's a whole *type* of teacher now who is a lot hipper than the ones that I certainly had.

MARK: *Before we sign off is there something that you'd like to add that we haven't talked about?*

MATT: Just that the publishing company that I work for, Pantheon Books, a division of Random House, is expanding its line of cartoonists. In addition to me they print MAUS by **Art Spiegelman**, and they are going to be printing an anthology of the early issues of RAW, to be followed by a cartoon book by **Martin Buyer, Charles Burns,** another person I went to school with, **Linda Barry** and **Gary Panter,** my good buddy who is the designer of PEE-WEE'S PLAYHOUSE. Pantheon is really taking an assertive role. It's a very sophisticated, serious publishing company that is getting cartoons out of the comic-book stores and into the book stores. Many of my readers, and I would think the readers of these other guys, would not set foot in a comic-book store in a million years, because it's all kiddy stuff and what little good stuff there is that they could relate to they don't want to wade through it to get to it.



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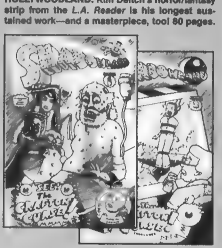

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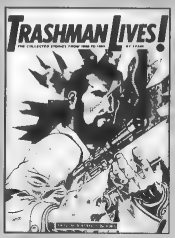

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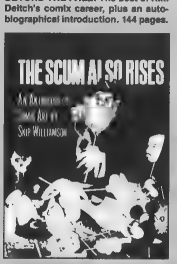

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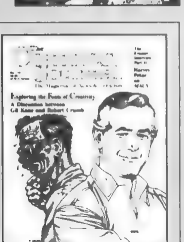

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"I kept wondering what the hell it

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The original title of CONAN THE DESTROYER was CONAN, KING OF THIEVES, for which Stout did this "inspirational piece, in an attempt to sum up a lot of what I thought should be the feeling of the film."

You've seen his illustrations countless times on movie posters, comic book covers, and record albums. His design work has set the tone for films ranging from CONAN to MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE. And if you're a fan of dinosaurs, you've no doubt drooled over his beautiful paintings of prehistoric life. It seems like Bill Stout has done it all -- yet he remains busy with new projects and always seems to be stretching his artistic horizons. Susan and I, long admirers of his work, were lucky enough to meet with Bill in his incredible studio, where we found him to be friendly, articulate, and knowledgeable about a host of subjects. Bill has so many interesting things to say, we couldn't cover them all — unfortunately, you won't be reading about how he climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro in a record three days, or about his adventures in Antarctica, but at least they've been mentioned -- that we ran out of time before we could cover everything! Through it all, Bill was warm, patient, and generous with his time . . .

Wm. STOUT

All artwork accompanying this interview is © 1989 William Stout, unless otherwise noted

was with this 'storytelling' thing."

AN II

CONAN, KING of THIEVES

LAMAR WALDRON: *Bill, looking around it's a bit obvious that you like dinosaurs. How did you come to get this fixation?*

BILL STOUT: Well, my two oldest media memories, the two earliest things I can ever remember seeing as far as film, are seeing KING KONG in a drive-in when they re-released it in the '50s, and seeing the "Rite of Spring" sequence from FANTASIA when they showed that on TV.

LAMAR: *And those made an impression on you.*

BILL: Burned into my brain.

LAMAR: *How many other people ever saw the black-and-white KING KONG in a drive-in? That must have been pretty neat, if you had a lot of trees and stuff around and he comes crashing through.*

BILL: Yeah, the whole thing flipped me out. I was scared to death, especially when Kong grabbed **Fay Wray** out of the hotel room.

LAMAR: *About how old were you then?*

BILL: Oh, probably about four or five.

LAMAR: *Did this manifest itself in your artwork at that young age?*

BILL: Not at that age, but at about seven, when most boys were drawing dinosaurs, I was *heavily* into drawing dinosaurs. I was also drawing movie monsters, Frankenstein and the Wolfman and Dracula all the old Universal guys. One of the things that got me deeper into dinosaurs was when I mentioned in class that I had a scrapbook of monsters — let's see, this was in the fifth grade. My teacher, **Eliot Wittenberg**, overheard this and asked to see it, asked me to bring it in. Later on I realized that he expected to see a scrapbook of prehistoric monsters, dinosaurs; so as not to disappoint him — I really liked this teacher - that night I went home and I filled the entire rest of this scrapbook with drawings of dinosaurs, then brought it in the next day. He really encouraged me from then on, encouraged my artwork. He was the one, actually, that I dedicated my dinosaur book to.

LAMAR: *Did he like the book? Did he get to see it eventually?*

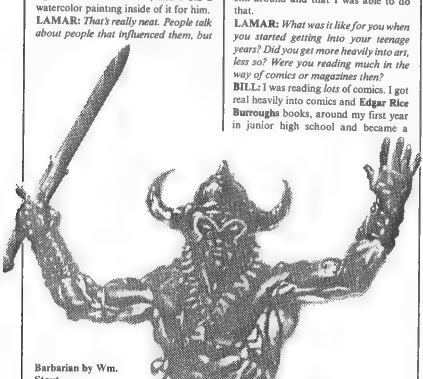
"I've only met two people whom I

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: William Stout
Born: 18 September 1949 — Salt Lake City, UT
Occupation: Artist and Writer; Production Designer
Education: B.A. degree — California Institute of the Arts (Chouinard Art Institute)
Credits: **(Album Covers)** for the Beach Boys, the Firesign Theatre, EMPIRE STRIKES BACK, plus about 45 bootleg covers for the Who, the Stones, Led Zep, etc.: **(Animation)** Commercials for Lennox and the Dept. of HEW; **(Book Covers)** TIME MACHINE series; DINOSAUR TALES by Ray Bradbury; **(Books, Author)** THE DINOSAURS, A Fantastic New View of a Lost Era; THE LITTLE BLUE BRONTOSAURUS: **(Books, Illustrator)** the above; THE ILLUSTRATED HARLAN ELLISON; ILLUSTRATED BEACH BOYS BIOGRAPHY; DINOSAUR DICTIONARY; DINOSAUR SCRAPBOOK; DINOSAUR TALES; **(Comics/Comix/Strips, Artist)** TARZAN Sundays and dailies with Russ Manning; LITTLE ANNIE FANNY with Kurtzman and Elder; MICKEY AT 60; various undergrounds: **(Comics/Comix/Strips, Writer and Artist)** stories for CYCLETOONS; various undergrounds including FILIPINO MASSACRE and REALITYLAND; lotsa covers: **(Film Production Artist)** LEVIATHAN; HOUSE; THE HITCHER; FIRST BLOOD; both CONAN films: **(Film Production Designer)** RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD; MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE; unmade GODZILLA, KING OF THE MONSTERS; unmade THE NATURAL HISTORY PROJECT, a Jim Henson dinosaur movie; **(Movie Posters)** WIZARDS; ROCK 'N' ROLL HIGH SCHOOL; MONTY PYTHON'S LIFE OF BRIAN; THE LADY IN RED; MORE AMERICAN GRAFFITI: **(Story & Screenplay)** WARRIOR AND THE SORCERESS; Jim Henson's ill-fated dinosaur movie
Favorite Dinosaur: Tyrannosaurus Rex, of course

Favorite Monster Movie: KING KONG — actually, my favorite movie of all time
Most Hated Cliche: In movie trailers and posters: "Beyond Your Imagination . . ." — AAARGH! When will they *stop* using that one?
Most Cranky Political Position: I am a *radical* environmentalist!
Cartoon Character Most Envied: None — I much prefer reality — it's more exciting!
Actress Would Most Like To Direct: Nastassia Kinski

BILL: Yes. I looked him up in 1981 when the book came out, made a trip over to his house and presented him with a signed hardcover edition, and I did a watercolor painting inside of it for him.
LAMAR: *That's really neat. People talk about people that influenced them, but not a lot can actually go back and find them.*
BILL: Indeed. I was really glad he was still around and that I was able to do that.
LAMAR: *What was it like for you when you started getting into your teenage years? Did you get more heavily into art, less so? Were you reading much in the way of comics or magazines then?*
BILL: I was reading *lots* of comics. I got real heavily into comics and **Edgar Rice Burroughs** books, around my first year in junior high school and became a heavy-duty collector.
LAMAR: *Which comics are we talking about here?*
BILL: Mostly DC comics, SUPERMAN, JUSTICE LEAGUE, FLASH, GREEN LANTERN. I became very infatuated with all of the books edited by **Julius Schwartz**, the so-called Silver Age heroes, Green Lantern and Flash and Adam Strange. To this day I consider those artists, the **Infantino** and **Anderson** team and **Gil Kane,** big influences on my work.
LAMAR: *That's interesting. You weren't that influenced by the Marvels at that age then?*
BILL: No. I got into the Marvels a lot later. I remember — I'm still kicking myself now — I remember seeing FANTASTIC FOUR #1 at the newsstand. It was in *such* a different style than the DCs that I thought it couldn't last.
LAMAR: *Yeah, they just didn't look as slick, did they?*
BILL: They *didn't* look as slick, they looked a lot cruder, especially **Ditko's** stuff. Now I love his stuff more than almost anything, but at the time it seemed so cartoonesy and less realistic than the DC stuff so I just let them sit there on the rack, passed them by. *(Laughs.)*
LAMAR: *It's just — I hate to be a $1.89 art critic here — but I can see your work*



Barbarian by Wm. Stout.

would really consider geniuses."

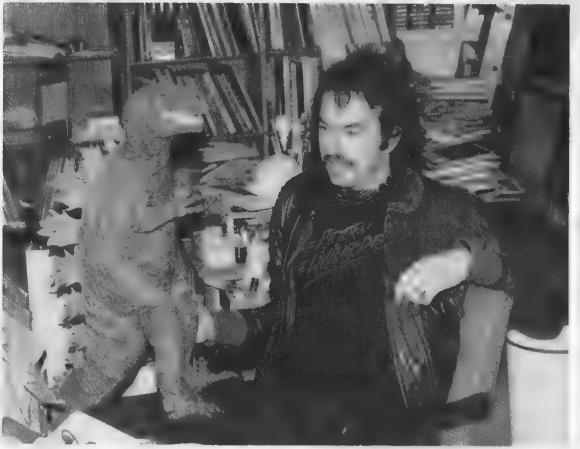


Photo: Waldron & Barrows

has a real finish and a polish to it, kind of not unlike that early to mid '60s DCs by Gil Kane, Infantino, and Murphy Anderson — I guess in some of the brush strokes and the shadowing and stuff like that. Did you ever get to meet any of those guys?

BILL: I've never met **Murphy Anderson**, but I'd like to. I met **Infantino** at a San Diego Comic Convention. I met **Gil Kane** back east when I was working on LITTLE ANNIE FANNY, and I've talked to him since, at a San Diego Comic Convention.

SUSAN BARROWS: *He has amazing eyebrows.*

LAMAR: *I always thought he looks like one of the characters he drew.*

SUSAN: *He has the philtrum.*

BILL: He does. That was one thing other fans and I used to wonder about, we used to try to visualize what the different artists looked like by looking at their work. We figured **Jack Kirby** must have

Sketchbook art by Bill.

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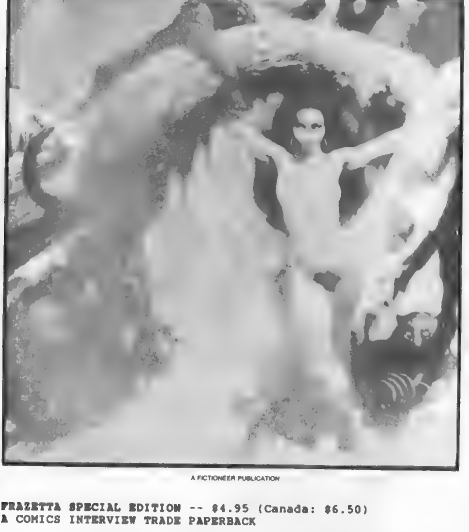

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"Jack Kirby must have big thick blunt fingers."

these big thick blunt fingers. *(Laughter.)* **Steve Ditko** must have these amazing hands with fingers that can go in almost any position. *(Laughter.)* When I moved to New York, his was the first number I looked up in the phone book. I didn't call him — it was just a thrill to see this great man listed.

LAMAR: *Were you aware of comics fandom when you were a teenager, or did that come later, or was it mainly just reading comics that you'd get off of the stands and not having much contact with other readers?*

BILL: My last year of junior high school I met a guy named **Fred Romanek** while I was sifting through comics in an old bookstore. He was the one who introduced me to fandom. It was something I had no idea existed. He showed me copies of **Roy Thomas's** ALTER EGO and **G.B. Love's** ROCKET'S BLAST COMIC COLLECTOR and all of that early stuff. Then together we put out our own fanzine, COMICS PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE, which was a mimeo ditto 'zine. Fred also showed me my first original art, it was the original art to a Batman story.

LAMAR: *Do you remember who did it?*

BILL: Well, it was signed **Bob Kane**, of course. *(Laughter.)*

LAMAR: *Of course, it could have been any of about a dozen people.*

BILL: It was done in the '60s. I remember being *amazingly* impressed by how slick the art was, and also of course by how large it was.

LAMAR: *What was that like doing your own fanzine? Did you get much good feedback from it?*

BILL: I got a lot of great feedback from Fred. *(Laughter.)* But I can't remember the letters that came in or anything like that.

LAMAR: *Did you keep doing it or was it kind of a one-shot?*

BILL: It was a one-shot, then we decided to put out our own comic. COMICS PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE was sort of a review fanzine containing articles with the depth of importance of such subject matter as "What If Spider-Man Joined the Fantastic Four?" *(Laughter.)* Then we'd do illustrations of the characters to show, "Gee, this is what it would look like if Spider-Man joined the Fantastic Four!" *(Laughter.)* What a concept! After that we decided that we should do our *own* comics, create our own heroes. I finished mine, but Fred never finished his so it never got printed. I think I printed one or two panels in the CAPS newsletter. You know about

A color piece by Bill: "Date With An Angel."

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"I had intended to become a doctor."

CAPS?

LAMAR: *Is that an amateur press association?*

BILL: No, it's the Comic Art Professional Society.

LAMAR: *Well, tell us about CAPS a little bit.*

BILL: CAPS is an organization that was founded by **Mark Evanier, Don Rico,** and **Sergio Aragones.** I was on the founding board and have been a president. Basically it's a social group of comics artists and writers based in Southern California. Our purpose is not only to get together socially, but also to educate each other about techniques in writing and in art, and in business and professional problems. It is *not* a guild or a union and it does not take political stances, but a lot of those type of things are discussed within the club.

LAMAR: *Do you find it helpful? Does it meet its set goals?*

BILL: Well, everyone's goals for the club are different. *(Laughter.)* For *me* it's great because I see the guys once a month I wouldn't normally see, all together in one group. *(Laughter.)* So it works well that way. I think a lot of the members get a lot out of the club. We have all different types of programs and talks and things.

LAMAR: *That sounds really nifty. It sounds like the social aspects are an important part.*

BILL: Yes, it's a real important part. But also educating comics artists and writers as to their rights, as far as copyrights and trademarks and as to their business rights and what to expect, that's real important, too. I think that's something that *most* comics artists and writers are very naive about, and since I am one of the members who has had experience in fields other than comics, I can bring what those other fields have taught me into the club and help raise the consciousness of the other members.

LAMAR: *That sounds like a real helpful thing for the younger or the newer people in the industry and in southern California to be in on.*

BILL: It keeps a lot of the newer people from being exploited.

LAMAR: *And there's a good need for that, a real good need. It's a shame there's nothing like that in New York where a lot of the exploitation takes place.*

BILL: Yes. Lately, there's been this mass exodus from New York to Los Angeles of all of these different artists and writers.

LAMAR: *Well, back on the chronological bandwagon, you've produced your own fanzine, you've done your own comic but not done much with it. Where did you sort of go from there with art, as a career and as your interest in comics?*

BILL: Actually I had intended to become a doctor all along, even while I was doing the comics and the art and everything. I was a science and math major in school, all the way through high school, and the scholarship I won to the art school that I went to was a result of my SAT scores, my math and English scores.

"CONAN was a terrible film, boring

TWO HOMALOCEPHALE DRINKING

SPINOSAURUS - Storm

LAMAR: *You won a scholarship to art school based on being good in math and English — o-kay.*

BILL: What happened was that in my last two years of high school we moved to a different part of town and I went to a different high school, and it was just a dreadful, *awful* school. Oh, it was terrible. Most of the teachers were there, I think, because of tenure. There was no way of getting rid of them, and they could care less about teaching kids. I wasn't learning anything, and I hated the attitude of the administration of the school, and I thought — you know, naively — I thought, "Boy, after I graduate I have to go through seven years of premed and two years of internship, if school after this is *anything* like this, then I don't want any part of it."

So I thought about what else I liked to do. I like to draw, and so almost at the last minute — in fact I think it was right after I had taken the SAT test — I decided I was not going to be a doctor, I was going to become an artist. So I investigated the local art schools and decided I would try to go to Chouinard Art School, which is also called Cal-Arts.

Then I found out that there was no way I could afford to go to either school — at that time there was Cal-Arts and there was Art Center. But I got the scholarship, so I was able to go.

LAMAR: *That worked out well.*

BILL: I graduated in June of '67 and over the weekend I moved to Los Angeles, and that following Monday I started art school.

LAMAR: *Did you find art school helpful?*

BILL: Yea, *enormously* helpful. *(Laughter.)* Actually it was helpful in every way. I was really lucky because Chouinard Art School was one of the best art schools in the country, if not the world, at the time. Their faculty was just astonishing.

LAMAR: *They didn't look upon illustration as a poor stepchild of the art world?*

BILL: They wouldn't have had an illustration department if they had.

LAMAR: *That's a big step in the right direction. Most major universities don't have that, but this sounds a lot more specialized.*

BILL: This art college had an illustration department and a fine arts department

"Thumbnail" sketches, many of which evolved into fully-rendered pieces.

(INSECTS + Ornitholestes

A CAOSAURUS, HUNTING IN THE FOREST AT NIGHT, JUST MISSES A FAT MOTH

X LAMBEOSAURUS LAMBEI

HELICOPRION DEINONYCHUS

and slow and just plain awful."

and a fashion design department . . . ceramics, film and music.

LAMAR: *Wow. And you really got a lot out of it?*

BILL: Yes! Most of the film department and was funded by **Disney** in fact **Walt Disney** left the bulk of his estate to my school.

LAMAR: *A-ha!*

BILL: That's how the new Cal-Arts was financed and built.

SUSAN: *Oh, is that the Magic Mausoleum?*

BILL: Yeah, up near Magic Mountain.

LAMAR: *The Magic Mausoleum?*

SUSAN: *Yeah, a bequest in his will went to the school, what they call Walt's Tomb or the Magic Mausoleum, according to the book.*

BILL: Yeah, it was quite generous. I don't think it turned out *quite* exactly the way Walt had envisioned. *(Laughter.)*

LAMAR: *You mean they don't have "DUCKS 101" as a prerequisite for all of the students coming in?*

BILL: Actually the school went through an extreme change when it turned from the Chounard Art School Cal-Arts in Los Angeles into the Cal-Arts over in the San Fernando Valley. For one thing they eliminated all of the graphic art departments except for fine arts. So that was a sudden "**WHOA!**"

LAMAR: *Where's the practical application for this stuff anymore?*

BILL: Yes — where!?

LAMAR: *No ink and pen people coming out of there now?*

BILL: No. God, we had **T. Hee** teaching in the animation department.

LAMAR: *(Gasp!) Yeah? You don't just get instructors like that!*

BILL: **Edith Head** was the head of our fashion design. **Ravi Shankar** was head of music.

LAMAR: *I guess they don't really have you over to talk about stuff anymore then, huh.*

BILL: Nope.

LAMAR: *Okay, so then you get out of there with your sheepskin. Were you active in comics fandom through college or did you get out of it then, how did that go?*

BILL: I was constantly collecting. In order to *properly* collect you have to be informed, and in order to be informed you have to subscribe to the different publications, so you'll know whenever a particular character you are collecting is going to appear in a different book.

LAMAR: *So you're reading, what COMIC COLLECTOR, RBCC?*

BILL: Yes, I borrowed friends' RBCCs. I don't think I had subscriptions to anything.

LAMAR: (Laughter.) *You'd just get copies from friends*

BILL: I'd ask them for extras. *(Laughter.)*

LAMAR: *Did you ever do a cover for RBCC? I think I saw your ad work — yeah, you did illustrations for the American Comic Book Company.*

BILL: You're right. I don't think I ever did a cover. I did some covers and some interiors and stuff for a bunch of fanzines around the end of the '60s, I remember.

LAMAR: *Do you remember any of the titles?*

BILL: One was called SENTINEL, I can't remember where it was from.

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

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"We were sharing offices with Spielberg."

LAMAR: *I think I have a vague memory of SENTINEL, they did some Al Williamson or Steranko thing once.*

BILL: One thing I did, I got quite heavily into **Edgar Rice Burroughs** fandom. I *had* a subscription to ERBDOM and so I started doing art for ERBDOM. I did a whole batch of illustrations for I AM A BARBARIAN, **Burroughs'** vision of **Caligula's** life and times. **Russ Manning** saw those and called me up and asked me if I'd be his assistant.

LAMAR: *That's rather fortuitous.*

BILL: Incredible, I couldn't believe it.

LAMAR: *Were you a big Russ Manning fan at the time?*

BILL: Sure I was a big **Russ Manning** fan! I *loved* MAGNUS, ROBOT FIGHTER and I thought Russ was doing the best job on TARZAN anybody had *ever* done.

LAMAR: *Yeah, no doubt of that.*

BILL: So I was in heaven!

LAMAR: *I guess if there's a lesson here it's pay your dues as a fan and get noticed —*

BILL: I still pay dues — I don't think it ever stops.

LAMAR: *Keep on paying those dues. But that was your leap then from fandom to prodom, going from ERBDOM to the Russ Manning studio?*

BILL: As far as comics, yeah. Actually my first professional illustration work I did while I was still in art school. It was in 1968 — covers to the first four issues of an occult fiction magazine called COVEN 13. It contained short stories about the supernatural and horror.

LAMAR: *I've got a couple of those. It metamorphosized into WITCHCRAFT AND SORCERY for the last issue.*

BILL: I had nothing to do with that, it was the publisher. When it became WITCHCRAFT AND SORCERY it was owned by a bookstore owner here that specialized in science fiction books. I don't remember his name, but that's not who I was working for.

LAMAR: *So, that got you some pro work. What was your style like then? Very similar to today?*

BILL: Similar, a lot cruder but the same mix. I figured since I was the only illustrator illustrating the book that I should mix up the styles so it looked like there were more illustrators, like it was a classier publication that could afford to hire different people.

LAMAR: *Like a writer doing all of the stories under pseudonyms.*

BILL: Yes, and some of that happened. *(Laughter.)* Another reason I changed the styles in COVEN 13 was to keep from being bored. And I was at this real formative time in my life as an artist and *I* didn't know what I wanted to do or what direction to take artistically. "Gee, **Frazetta** looks great, I'll try to do something in that style. Oh, **Reed Crandall's** wonderful, maybe that's the way to go. Oh, **Roy Krenkel,** he's terrific." You know, you just keep reaching out and trying all of these different things, you start absorbing all of these influences, and out of *that* comes your own style.

LAMAR: *You mention Krenkel and Frazetta and Crandall. Who were some of the other guys whose work really turned you on?*

BILL: The guys that made me really crazy, and I still think they're incredible, were of course **Frazetta** and **Krenkel** and **Crandall,** but also **Al Williamson, Wally Wood, Kurtzman, Alex Toth,** and **Will Eisner.**

LAMAR: *That's interesting, a really broad range. So you kind of encompassed all of those things?*

BILL: Yes. Also at that time I was hanging out with people who talked about comics and stuff; they kept talking about "storytelling" and I kept *wondering* what the hell it was with this "storytelling" thing. You know, I'd look at the **Frazetta** stuff and think, "God, *that's* the secret, you just *draw* wonderful!" *(Laughter.)* Everything was "storytelling," and they kept bringing up the same names over and over and over, **Toth** and **Kurtzman** and **Eisner.** So I figured maybe I should look at these guys and

It was this Stout illustration for I AM A BARBARIAN published in the Edgar Rice Burroughs fanzine ERBDOM that caught Russ Manning's eye. After seeing it, he called Bill up and offered him a job assisting on the TARZAN Sunday and daily strips.

"Lisa's a big dinosaur fan, trying to convince her

see what they were talking about, and try to get my little peabrain to absorb some of this. *(Laughter.)* I'd look at the **Toth** stuff and I'd see his *beautiful* designs, and I noticed that everything was very clear as far as to what was being told in the story, but I couldn't figure out *how*. For me that was such an elusive concept. It wasn't something I could put my finger on, like, say, drawing a hand — "Well obviously he drew that finger too thick, he should change that." It's more of an abstract intellectual concept.

So I took **Harold Kramer's** advice, which is when you don't know about something but you know someone who is good at it, then you look at all of his stuff that you can find. A lot of it you'll start to get by osmosis, even if you *don't* understand it, your brain will take it in and start to digest it, not consciously but subconsciously. So I started collecting all of the **Toth** that I could find, and **Kurtzman** and **Elsner.** Then it started to dawn on me, "Gee, he staged this scene this way because he wanted to achieve this kind of psychological impact on you, and it also sets up a rhythm and a pacing so that it's almost a filmlike timespan structure that delivers that story point with a particular kind of impact. Oh, yeah, I get it. That's how you tell a story."

LAMAR: *Yeah, it's very tough to get trained in storytelling. A lot of guys, like say Al Williamson who is a very good storyteller, it's almost completely unconscious. It's almost like if it looks right to him then it tells a story. It's very hard to learn from that.*

BILL: It's harder to learn from someone like **Williamson** because you keep getting seduced by the fabulous draftsmanship.

LAMAR: *Yeah, yeah.*

BILL: Draftsmanship isn't the secret of storytelling, it's the design and the staging and sometimes the size of the panels.

LAMAR: *It sounds like you had a really good grounding in all of the basics, it looks like you were really well prepared to become one of America's great comics artists.*

BILL: That's why I decided to get into film. *(Laughter.)* I noticed that comics would take me so long to do, and also they paid so poorly. Most of the comics artists that I knew weren't making very much money, and I *knew* that I liked to eat in restaurants and I wanted to own my own home and things like that. I knew I couldn't produce like a **Jack Kirby,** I think the fastest I could work was two days a page.

LAMAR: *Pencils and inks?*

BILL: Pencils and inks, right. That wasn't fast enough to earn a living. I could earn a living back *then* because life was a lot cheaper back then, and I lived a lot more frugally. I didn't buy beautiful first editions — I would have *wanted* to buy them, but I just wasn't aware of them.

LAMAR: *So you got the feeling that there was something that paid a lot better than comics out there?*

BILL: Yes. I started looking at ways comic art could be applied to illustration, which pays much more than comics, in advertising, and I decided to just make the best money I could. So I sought out the jobs that paid the best.

LAMAR: *So, that led to the paperback covers, record album covers, and movie posters.*

BILL: Movie posters pay well. I was *astonished,* just couldn't believe it, what people got paid.

LAMAR: *Wait, let's backtrack — you're working with Russ Manning. What were you doing for Manning exactly?*

BILL: Just inking the background and background figures, as well as coloring and color-coding the Sunday strips.

LAMAR: *Then somehow you ended up working with Harvey Kurtzman on LITTLE ANNIE FANNY.*

BILL: At the same time I was working for Russ, I also began to do stories for CYCLE-TOONS edited By **Dennis Ellefson.** Dennis allowed me *enormous* freedom to experiment with all sorts of different styles, and about that same time I was turned on to the old MAD comics. There was one story in particular that really bent me forever, the Melvin Mole story that **Kurtzman** and **Elder** did in MAD #2. So I did a tribute story to **Kurtzman** and **Elder** and **Wally Wood.** I sent a copy of it to **Kurtzman,** and I got a letter back asking me if I'd like to work on ANNIE FANNY. Needless to say — *(Laughter.)* I hopped on the next plane, and worked with **Harvey Kurtzman** and **Will Elder** on two ANNIE FANNYs, "French Connection" (Sept. '72) and "Ralph Raider" (Nov. '72).

I began working out of Willie's studio, and I was sort of sandwiched in between Harvey and Willie. Harvey would write the stories and do these *very* meticulous pencils, then I would transfer the pencils to illustration board, correcting any anatomical errors that I saw. Then using a color guide that Harvey had done — he did watercolors on Xeroxes of his layouts — I would start to lay in transparent color washes over the art. Then it would go to Willie and Willie would do the finished paintings.

father (Jim Henson) to do a dinosaur movie."

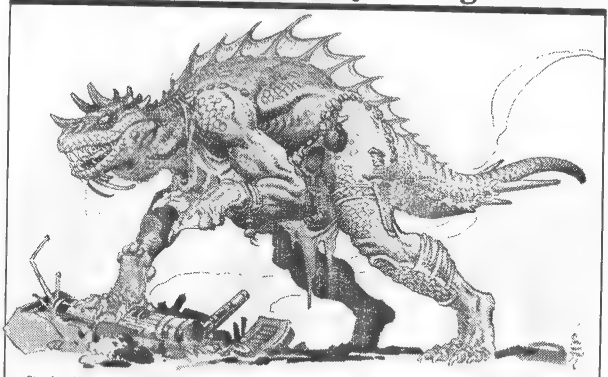
A hobo on J.C. Leyender's last two-color SATURDAY EVENING POST cover served as Stout's inspiration for the figure on this Deep Purple bootleg album cover.

"A producer hates to be the first

LAMAR: *Wow. That stuff comes out looking so meticulous and polished.*
BILL: That's because it takes *months* to do one story. After the art is finished it goes back to Harvey, and Harvey puts a tissue overlay over the art and makes about 200 corrections. It goes back to Willie, and Willie makes the corrections. It goes back to Harvey, and Harvey makes about 100 more corrections.
LAMAR: *What would be typical corrections that he would do?*
BILL: Oh, highlight this fingernail, put a little tiny shadow here — lots of little highlight indications to make things pop, or shadow indications to make things recede. This would go back and forth about five or six times, each page, until finally it was just like a jewel. Then either **Ben Oda** or another guy would do the lettering.
LAMAR: *Would the lettering be done on the art or on an overlay?*
BILL: On the art. The lettering balloons would be masked off with frisket until we were all finished with the art. After it came back Willie would do all the little fuzzy edging on all of the panel borders, and he would ink the final word balloons with ellipse guides.
LAMAR: *So what happened then? Did you get tired of all of this meticulous work, did something better come along?*
BILL: Well, Harvey saw that I was *far* too *independent* to be the invisible man on ANNIE FANNY, so we sort of *mutually* decided it would be best if I struck back out on my own. The reason I was hired was that **Hefner** wanted more ANNIE FANNY stories, so they were trying to figure out ways to speed up the production.
LAMAR: *Did it do that?*
BILL: Not much. *(Laughter.)*
LAMAR: *And you decided to strike out on your own. What came then?*
BILL: Well, after ANNIE FANNY I did a series of bootleg record album covers — around 1974 I did about 40 covers —
SUSAN: *Including The Firesign Theatre?*
BILL: Those were legit. *(Laughter.)* But I did —
LAMAR: *Were you hired because you had done all of these bootlegs?*
BILL: No. The album cover and my relationship with the guys in **The Firesign Theatre** came about because of **Dave Gibson**, who had published the reprint of the EC membership kit and stuff like that, and the little SPIRIT bags. **The Firesign Theatre** had done a series of little newsletters called THE MIXVILLE ROCKET when they were living in Echo Park, and **Dave Gibson** got permission to collect them and republish them. He asked me to do the cover, that's how my work came to the attention of the boys in **The Firesign Theatre.** Then they asked me to do the cover to their next album. I did a whole series of T-shirts for them, and I worked on their film EVERYTHING YOU KNOW IS WRONG, and did two or three more album covers for them.
LAMAR: *When was that?*
BILL: It was around 1977 and '78. By then I was doing album covers. Then I

"We were actually in the middle of shooting MASTERS when Mattel sprang it on us they had held a 'Be in the He-Man movie' contest, and that the winner would be flying in from Ohio to appear in our film in just *two days!*" laughed Stout. "Two hours later I'd completed this design. It went out immediately to the costumers and the make-up people, and to their credit, they came up with some great one-size-fits-all stuff (we were told only his *age, not his size*) just under the wire! Though I'd dubbed him 'Mata Shal', this character's nickname on the set was 'The Little Pig Boy.'"

guy to give talent any new ground."



Stout's early concepts for the MASTERS character Saurod were far more lizardlike than what was ultimately settled upon.

started doing lots of movie posters.

LAMAR: *How did you get into movie posters?*

BILL: Through my underground comix, actually. An art director at Seiniger and Associates, **Davie Reneric,** was a big fan of underground comix, and he was an especially big fan of **Robert Williams.** This job came up, S★P★Y★S with **Elliot Gould** and **Donald Sutherland,** and they didn't like the poster they had from **Rick Meyerowitz,** didn't like the likenesses of either **Elliot Gould** or the girl, and Rick refused to change them. So they needed a guy who could do other people's styles. David called **Robert Williams** who said, "This isn't my kind of job, you should call **Bill Stout,** he does all *kinds* of different styles." So they called me in.

LAMAR: *So all the movie poster fans can look and see if they can tell what's Meyerowitz and what's Stout.*

BILL: If I did my job, they *can't* tell. *(Laughter.)* Then I sort of began a relationship with **George Lucas.** Every time they needed some cartoon-style artwork, George would have me hired. I was hired to do a big ad campaign for the re-release of AMERICAN GRAFFITI, and I did the poster for MORE AMERICAN GRAFFITI –

LAMAR: *Yeah. I remember that one.*

BILL: And because of that I became more familiar with Seiniger and Associates and they began to use me for a lot of different things. I did the MONTY PYTHON'S LIFE OF BRIAN poster —

LAMAR: *I didn't realize that.*

BILL: Yeah. The first poster I had done on my own was the WIZARDS poster. I had been doing work for a small ad agency in Westwood who happened to get that account for some reason. They knew I did cartooning, in fact I was the *only* person they knew who did cartooning, and so I did a whole series of roughs for them and then the finished poster for WIZARDS.

Stout was the ideal choice to do the letters column heading for the TWISTED TALES comic book.

"I've written a sequel to RETURN

LAMAR: *And among movie poster fans that's a really sought-after item. That was one of the first times I remember seeing your work.*

BILL: There's two versions of that. The original is the one with the skull and the flies and the yellow eyes. Four days before the release of the film, 20th Century Fox decided that that was too scary for kids and they had me redo it in one day and change it into what became the broad release poster. I traded the skull and bones in for mushrooms and flowers and butterflies and stuff. *(Laughter.)* Amazingly they got it printed and distributed in time for the opening of the film, which was three days later by the time they got the poster.

LAMAR: *Your introduction to the high pressure world of movie posters.*

BILL: Yeah. It was nice, though, I found out what **Frazetta** was talking about when it came to the amount of work spent on movie posters in proportion to the amount of money paid. From the WIZARDS poster I was able to take my girlfriend and myself to the Galapagos for a month and a half, travel throughout the islands and then go to Ecuador and Peru — it was great!

LAMAR: *A step up from bootleg records and underground comix.*

BILL: Yes! When I found out you could make *real* money — *(Laughter.)* I set my sights on doing movie posters. And boy, at one time, around 1978, I think during August I had eight movie posters out all at once. That wasn't my plan, it just happened that some of the films I had done posters for had been delayed, then suddenly they all sort of piled on top of each other.

LAMAR: *It might be good in the interview to show some of your movie posters, the well-known ones like MORE AMERICAN GRAFFITI and WIZARDS, and some of the lesser known ones, too.*

BILL: ROCK 'N' ROLL HIGH SCHOOL.

LAMAR: *I didn't know you did ROCK 'N' ROLL HIGH SCHOOL.*

BILL: LADY IN RED, UP FROM THE DEPTHS, FOOLIN' AROUND.

SUSAN: *UP FROM THE DEPTHS has a shark coming up on a woman swimming.*

BILL: I did that directly for **Roger Corman**, he wanted a poster that combined JAWS with the Latin American

Illustration from Bill's DRAGON SLAYERS portfolio.

OF THE LIVING DEAD."

© 1979 New World Pictures

Where the 3 R's stand for ROCK, RIOT and REBELLION!

The school where the students rule!

"Rock 'n' Roll High"

Stout first met Joe Dante and Allan Arkush in a small editing room in Hollywood where they were finishing up their work on ROCK 'N' ROLL HIGH SCHOOL. Besides this newspaper ad, Stout also did the poster for the film and made it (at Roger Corman's request) to "look just like ANIMAL HOUSE".

campaign poster for PIRANHA. I did three posters for **Corman**, UP FROM THE DEPTHS, LADY IN RED, and ROCK 'N' ROLL HIGH SCHOOL. From doing ROCK 'N' ROLL HIGH SCHOOL I got to meet **Joe Dante** and **Allan Arkush**, the director of the picture, and **Mike Finnell**, their producer, and I became sort of a cameo art loaner to their films. In THE HOWLING they wanted to decorate the boy's bedroom, so I loaned them some posters of mine. I did the same thing for GREMLINS.

LAMAR: *And at this time you were just doing the movie posters, or had you gotten into the design side at all?*

BILL: I was strictly doing movie posters, which is a whole business that is entirely

"Our goal is to become fabulously

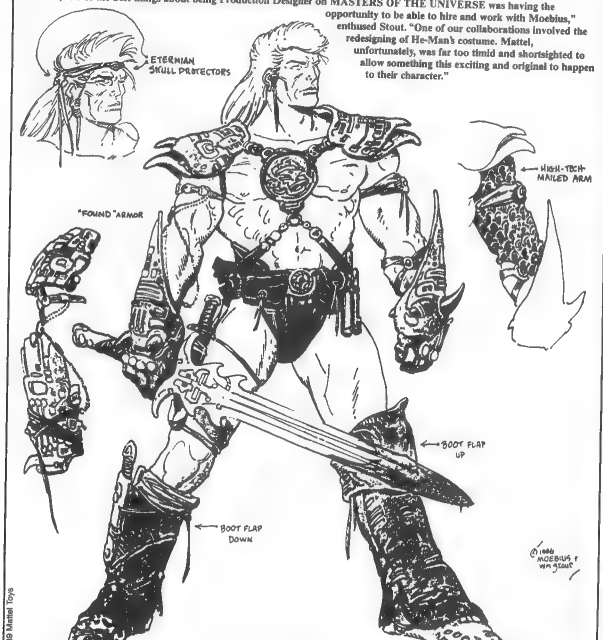
separate and removed from making films. In fact one of the odd things of this business, the ironic things, is I've done now *easily* over 30 or 40 movie posters for films I never worked on, and I've never been asked to do a movie poster in all of the 20 films I have worked on.

LAMAR: *Well, I guess that makes Hollywood sense.*

BILL: Of *course!* At about that time a friend of mine, **Bob Greenberg,** he kept calling me and saying, "Look, you've got to work on this CONAN film. It's going to be terrific; **Ron Cobb** is the production designer." I didn't know about *working* on it, but I sure wanted to meet **Ron Cobb.** He was a hero of mine, I had followed his underground cartoon panels from the old L.A. FREE PRESS days. But I was just too backed up with work at the time, so I had to keep putting it off and putting it off. Bob did bring around to my studio another artist being considered for the film — **Richard Corben.** That was a real treat. I think Richard ended up working for about a day on the film.

I *finally* got a break from my work, and I was at the American Book Convention, the big ABA show — it happened to be in L.A. that year — and I happened to have my portfolio with me, and I bumped into **Ron Cobb!** I talked to him and he said, "Look, you're the person I want to work with the most, here's the problem: All the people *I* want

"For me, one of the best things about being Production Designer on MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE was having the opportunity to be able to hire and work with Moebius," enthused Stout. "One of our collaborations involved the redesigning of He-Man's costume. Mattel, unfortunately, was far too timid and shortsighted to allow something this exciting and original to happen to their character."



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wealthy so that we can do comics."

to work with, **John Milius** doesn't want to work with; and all of the people **John Milius** wants to have work with *me, I* don't want to work with — and we've both agreed that we both *have* to agree. So please come over tomorrow and drop off your portfolio so that John can see it."

So, I went to the offices to drop it off and John happened to be there. He thumbed through it and he recognized a story that he had liked from HEAVY METAL, **Harlan Ellison's** "Shattered Like a Glass Goblin." I also had with me stats of a portfolio I had just done, which was called "Dragonslayers" — this had nothing to do with DRAGONSLAYER the movie — and he really liked that stuff. Then he quickly leafed through the rest and closed the book and handed it to me, and in very characteristic, dramatic **John Milius** fashion began to walk out of the room. And from just sort of over his shoulder he barked back, "Hire him." Little did I know I was about to take a *severe* cut in pay, compared to what I was making in movie posters, and that this would last for a year and a half. I grew quite fond of John and his . . . personality. *(Laughter.)*

And it also so happened that when I began working there, we were sharing offices with **Steven Spielberg,** who was just finishing 1941 and was beginning RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK. He solicited input from **Cobb** and me, on that picture — we did a little moonlighting. *(Laughter.)* I ended up mostly *listening* to Ron and Steven. On CONAN THE BARBARIAN, I was initially hired to storyboard the film. I started storyboarding it in standard storyboard fashion, then **Milius** saw that first work and said, "No, I want you to do it like a comic book." So I asked him for input, and he said, "Just do it the way *you* would direct it. I already know how *I'm* going to do it, and if you come up with any *better* ideas, then, I'll just use those." So for the first two months I did storyboards, but I sort of quickly grew weary of that. I was sitting in a room with **Ron Cobb** all of the time, Ron was doing all of these production paintings and production art, and I thought, "Boy, that looks a whole lot more fun than what I'm doing, *that's* what I'd really like to do." And after two months Ron and John agreed that I would help out Ron and start designing all of the stuff that Ron didn't have the time for.

LAMAR: *Were you finished with the storyboards then, or did that go to someone else?*

BILL: No, we just let it go, we never pursued storyboards after that.

LAMAR: *But you got to do what you wanted to.*

BILL: And more!

LAMAR: *How did that work out?*

BILL: That worked out great. I mean just to have the opportunity to work a year and a half alongside **Ron Cobb**, that has to be one of the great experiences of anyone's life. I'll tell you, I've met an enormous amount of truly brilliant and talented people in my life, but I've only met *two* people who I'd really consider geniuses — **Ron Cobb** and **Moebius.** So what a trip and a joy to be able to work with Ron.

"I was asked by Geoff Darrow to do a tribute to Moebius for eventual inclusion in a book," related Stout. "I chose one of my favorite Moebius characters, Arzach, as my subject matter. I find it ironic that I did what I consider to be one of my best works for a character I didn't create!"

LAMAR: *You've got good taste in artists there. Do you think you'll ever get to work with Moebius?*

BILL: I did. I hired **Moebius** to do designs for me on MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE; he was the first person I called when they made me production designer. It was like a dream come true.

(Guess what, that's not all folks!!! The following pages, directly from Bill Stout's portfolio . . . well, we're positive *you will just marvel and revel! Be sure to look for the next COMICS INTERVIEW, for Bill Stout, Part 2!)*

HUMBLE ORIGINS---

EVOLUTION OF A SUPER HERO ARTIST
©1985 William Stout

IT'S ALWAYS BEEN MY DREAM TO DRAW SUPERHERO COMICS. I'VE BEEN DRAWING THEM SINCE I WAS IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL.

MY WORK NOW HAS A SLICK PROFESSIONAL QUALITY TO IT. I THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE INTERESTING (MAYBE EVEN ENCOURAGING) TO EXPOSE SOME OF THIS EARLY STUFF.

HERE IS ONE OF MY EARLIEST SUPERHERO DRAWINGS (1962). THE UPPER FIGURE WAS SWIPED FROM A KANE/ANDERSON "ATOM" DRAWING. THE LOWER ONE IS ORIGINAL, BOTH INKED WITH BALLPOINT.

THIS PANEL IS FROM A STORY DRAWN FOR A PROPOSED MIMEO COMIC THAT WAS TO HAVE BEEN PUBLISHED BY FRED ROMANEK IN 1963-64. DONE WITH PENCIL ON DITTO MASTER.

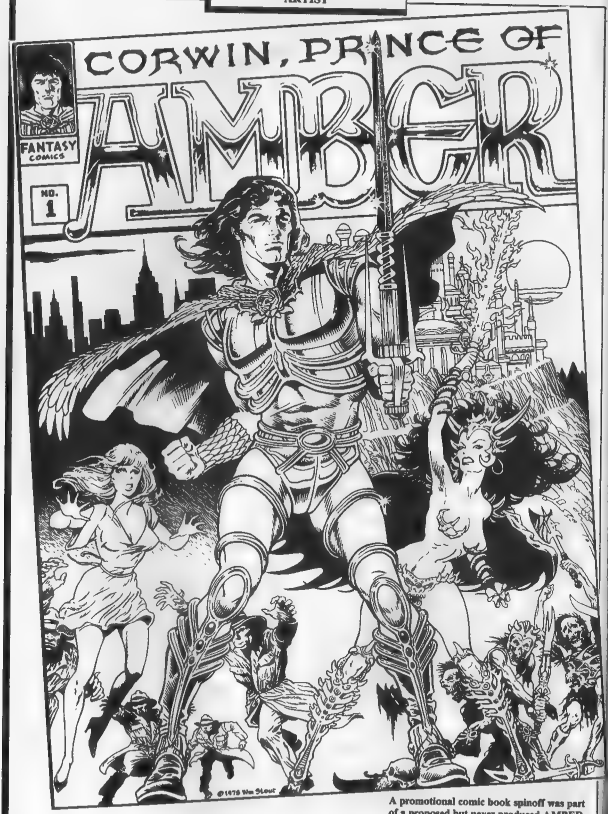
THIS PART OF A STRIP DRAWN FOR MY HIGH SCHOOL PAPER IN 1965 CONCERNS A GUY WHO'S BITTEN BY A MAGIC COBRA THEN FALLS ASLEEP, DREAMS ABOUT CHRISTY MARX, AND WAKES UP A SUPER-HERO.

I THINK MY EARLY WRITING IS FUNNIER THAN MY EARLY ART!

MORTAL! YOU HAVE BEEN CHOSEN AS AN AVENGER OF WRONG BRING BACK HE WHO STEALS! YOU WILL BE GRANTED FOUR POWERS! FROM NOW ON YOU WILL BE KNOWN AS...

"Humble Origins:" "I've always wanted to draw superhero comics," claims Stout. "These were drawings I did as a teenager — you gotta start *somewhere*!"

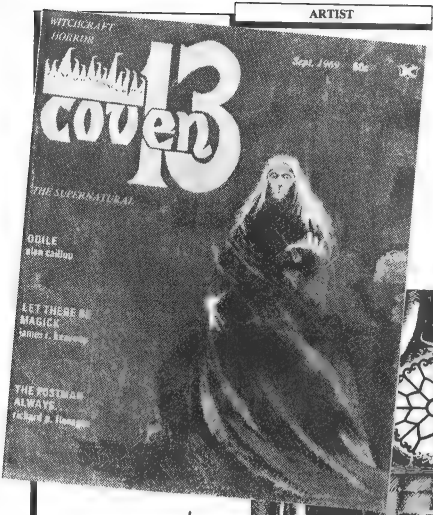
Originally drawn as Stout says "for the hell of it", "Midnight Mass" saw public light first as a black-and-white print, then as a color print and finally as a classical record album cover.



A promotional comic book spinoff was part of a proposed but never produced AMBER film, based upon the popular science fantasy series by Roger Zelazny. Stout also did a series of paintings of key scenes from the film in collaboration with Boris Vallejo to promote the project.

© DeLaurentiis

John Milius wrote this baby-dashing scene into the first CONAN film so that Dino DeLaurentiis would have something to cut out of the script.



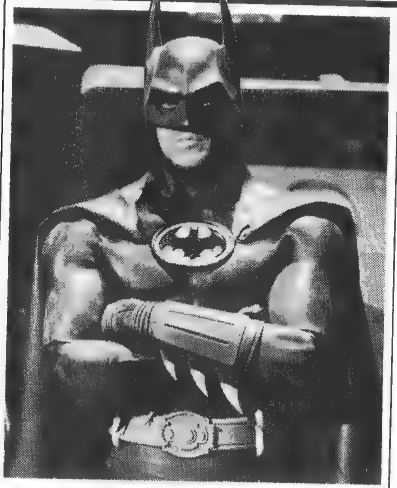
Stout's first professional job was this cover he painted (while still in art school) for the first issue of the pulp magazine COVEN 13.

A later issue of "Coven 13" boasted this interior illustration for a story about the "Shadow Trader". Stout did all the covers and interior illustrations to the first four issues.

WIZARDS

The WIZARDS movie poster is inarguably one of the single most recognizable pieces from William Stout's long and varied career.

"Boy, wouldn't it be neat to get an old, 1950s



Batman in his high-tech state-of-the-art Batcave in Warner Bros.' epic action-adventure film BATMAN (note: Warner Bros. wrote this copy).

So, is this it? Have comic books finally become socially acceptable? Is BATMAN, the movie, causing millions of new fans to flock into comic book shops? To find out, we talked to Steve Sibra — owner of Rocket Comics in Seattle and a regular contributor to THE OFFICIAL OVERSTREET COMIC BOOK PRICE GUIDE...

JOHN LUSTIG: *Well, let's get right down to the big question. Have you had many new people coming in because of the BATMAN movie?*

STEVE SIBRA: Quite a few. How much of that will translate into return customers is questionable. But there have definitely been some new faces. They're buying the little Batman figures, the Batman pencils — those types of things. These ancillary items don't sell real well to regular comic book customers. I sell more of that stuff to first timers.

JOHN: *Are these new people buying BATMAN comics as well?*

STEVE: Occasionally, but not in great amounts. They might pick up one comic — usually a new issue. On the other hand, I've had a couple of people call up looking for old stuff. These people didn't sound like comic book fans. It sounded like their interest had been primed enough by the movie and all the hoopla that they thought, "Boy wouldn't it be neat to get an old, 1950s BATMAN comic book like I had when I was a kid."

JOHN: *Are they picking up any comics besides the ones with Batman?*

STEVE SIBRA

©1989 DC Comics Inc.

BATMAN comic book like I had when I was a kid."

Steve Sibra, retailer, and "pocket friend" THE BATMAN

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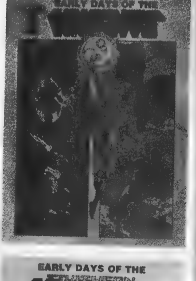

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A COMICS INTERVIEW PUBLICATION

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"The fad aspect of Batman makes you wonder."

STEVE: Maybe a little bit, but it's mostly centered on BATMAN.

JOHN: *And even then they're not buying that much?*

STEVE: I think some of the "Batman" centered stores are probably benefiting a lot more from this Batman craze than the comic book stores are. In downtown Seattle there's a boutique that's opened up that sells nothing but Batman stuff and it's doing thousands and thousands of dollars a day.

Of course, the boutique will be gone in six months.

JOHN: *You'll survive and they won't, but in the meantime you're not doing thousands and thousands of dollars a day in Batman merchandise.*

STEVE: No, but it has helped business. It definitely has.

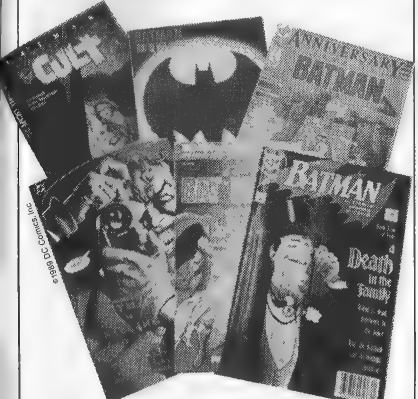
JOHN: *Most of these new people have never been in a comic shop. What kind of age group are you getting in terms of the new people?*

STEVE: They're mostly adults — from their 20s to their 50s. I've noticed more parents coming in with their kids since this whole Batman thing came up. Many of these kids have been coming here for years. But it's only in the last month or so that I've seen the *parents* of a lot of these people. Even in the incidences where the parents don't buy anything, they do express some interest. There's a heightened awareness of comic books in these people.

JOHN: *Do any of the new people ever say things like, "Wow! This isn't anything like the old TV show?"*

STEVE: Yeah, there are people who make comparisons between the movie and the TV show — mostly in a favorable way as per the new image. There are very few people — less than I would have expected — who've said, "Boy, I liked Batman a lot better when it was the camp stuff." There's not much of that. Most people seem happy to see a more adult — if you want to call it that — presentation of Batman.

The whole fad aspect of this Batman thing makes you wonder. On the one hand, it's hard to say it's anything but good for comics to have all this attention drawn to them. And it's been mostly positive attention. I haven't had anyone come in here and say, "Oh, the BATMAN movie was exceedingly violent and horrible." I haven't gotten that sort of feedback.



Some of what's cutting into Marvel's mutant books — at Steve's shop.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Steve Sibra
Born: 2 March 1956 — Havre, Mt.
Residence: Seattle, WA
Current Occupation: Owner of Rocket Comics
Former Occupation: Editor for a legal publishing company
Worst Thing About Owning A Comic Book Store: Dealing with people who don't differentiate between reality and comic books. I refer to them as the Thing vs. Hulk people. That's what they want to talk about. They come in and ask, "If the Thing is fighting the Hulk who would win?"
So Who Would Win — The Thing Or The Hulk? I think Brother Power, the Geek could take them both.
Best Thing About Owning A Comic Book Shop: The people I see are usually happy to be here. They're spending their extra money on something they like. I get much more positive feedback from people than you probably do in most businesses.
Favorite Comics: I tend to like the more bizarre stuff. STICKBOY is great. My favorite comic is probably FLAMING CARROT.
Least Favorite Comics: X-MEN and all the "mutant-type comic books."

On the other hand, this is all just a fad and all fads eventually end. And when this one ends Batman is going to be out. Way out. It's going to be like disco or break dancing as far as the general populace is concerned. Hopefully, we'll win a few converts to comics before that happens. But it makes me wonder how Batman is going to be received — even by comic book fans.

You know, Batman was a pretty popular character before any of this went on. We've seen the prices on all the older stuff skyrocket. How will that be affected?

JOHN: *That's why I'm selling you all my back issues of BATMAN now!*

STEVE: *(Laughter.)* And hopefully I'm selling them to somebody else now.

JOHN: *Still, I wonder what it is about Batman that's catching everybody's imagination. Even taking into account all the merchandising and the hope, this is*

"More people sign up for BATMAN titles right now

incredible. It goes beyond just a reaction to a popular movie. There seems to be something about the concept that's captured the public's imagination. But what is it? Is Batman just a high-tech Dirty Harry in tights?

STEVE: That's a really good question, because we've got Batman's 50th anniversary that kind of coincides with the movie and there's some other things besides the movie maybe that are responsible for this happening right now. But we've had Superman's 50th anniversary and gone through four Superman movies and they never engendered this kind of reaction.

Of course, there's a big difference between the two of them. Superman is much a good-goodie character. He's an unrealistic character. And people see Batman as more realistic. I guess the general public sees Batman as a sort of Dirty Harry. A gritty underdog. But Dirty Harry never ascended to the level of popularity that Batman has now.

JOHN: *You know, as you were talking, it occurred to me that Superman — for all his powers — is not a violent character. Batman — as he's presented in the movie and recent comics — is quite violent.*

STEVE: That's sort of what I meant about Superman being a goodie-goodie

JOHN: *Right, he's a safe character.*

STEVE: Yes, exactly. He's not realistic in the sense that he only has one side. You can define his personality. Whereas with Batman — as he's been fleshed out in the last few years — it would be hard to define his personality.

Of course, Batman's popularity right now is just a fad. And with fads I don't know if people try to define — even in their own minds — why something is so popular. Ours is such a strange culture.

JOHN: *I know what you mean. A year ago if you told me that you'd have 40-year-old people coming into comic book shops — solely because of the BATMAN movie — I would have said, "Dream on!"*

STEVE: Right. Or attorneys phoning me from their cars on the way up to see what time I close because they want to get their Batman stuff. I mean, that has happened!

JOHN: *OK, let's talk for a moment about your regular customers. I know some people in the industry have been worried that fans would be spending so much money on Batman material that there wouldn't be much money left over to buy other comics — particularly comics from the smaller companies. Has that happened?*

STEVE: Well, obviously, BATMAN sales are much better right now among my regular customers. In this store there are probably more people signed up for BATMAN titles right now than any other comic — including the X-MEN. But I don't think it's hurt the independents as much as some people were concerned that it would. The independents that suffered — and I don't know if this is due to Batman or just a general trend we're experiencing right now — were the ones that were really peripheral anyway and not the stronger selling or even the moderately-strong selling independents.

JOHN: *Would those be more the peripheral superhero comics rather than something like YUMMY FUR?*

STEVE: No. It hasn't affected those sort of titles. But then it hasn't affected things like BADGER or NEXUS either.

JOHN: *Well, what sort of books has it affected?*

From Chester Brown, YUMMY FUR #13. These are just a few of the "clean" panels.

©1988 Chester Brown

than any other comic — including the X-MEN."

STEVE: Books like the ones that Eternity publishes. Also Adventure Publications. And a lot of the black and whites that just seem to be hanging on at least as far as this store's concerned. It's also affected the sales of Marvels. I think at least in part due to Batman, DC's are selling better. DC has been on an upward trend for a few years now. But the whole Batman thing has helped. The mainstay Marvel titles have been affected. Not SPIDER-MAN so much, because **Todd McFarlane** is doing the artwork and he's such a fan favorite. But for THE FANTASTIC FOUR, DAREDEVIL, THE X-MEN, X-FACTOR and THE NEW MUTANTS sales have declined in rough approximation of the way sales have increased on BATMAN and similar DC titles.

I think DC's line in general has been popularized — at least for books that are in any way comparable to BATMAN. I'm talking here about DC's comics that are geared more toward adults. A good example is ANIMAL MAN, which is selling tremendously well. I don't know if it's stretching it to tie that into BATMAN or not. But it's a superhero comic that's directed at a more adult audience. And a lot of DC's nonsuperhero adult-oriented comics — such as HELLBLAZER and SANDMAN — have improved in sales. THE QUESTION has improved in sales. And that is a comic I would compare to BATMAN in terms of philosophy.

JOHN: *Has that just happened in the last month?*

STEVE: I would say more in the last three or four months. It's hard to say how much of this is attributable to BATMAN.

JOHN: *I ask that because as we're talking the movie has just been out for about a month now.*

STEVE: Right, but there was a fair amount of hoopla before the movie. I had a lot of people talking about the movie even before it opened. I even heard some of that from non-comics people. You know I was recently back in Montana in Big Sandy where I grew up. It's a little bitty town and people there were talking about BATMAN. And this was before the movie came out! And that just blew me away, because the people there have never talked about comic books to my knowledge!

That kind of ties in with the image that Batman is perceived as having now, and that's one that's directed more towards adults. A lot of my BATMAN sales are to adults. Of course, this store probably sells a larger percentage of its comics to adults than most comic book stores, anyway. I probably have a larger percentage of adult clientele.

In any event, BATMAN isn't focusing just on the kids. I mean the kids want to wear the shirts and buy the regular comics sometimes. However I've recently sold a lot of DARK KNIGHT trade paperbacks and things like that to adults — regular customers who haven't been into Batman, but who've been hearing about THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS for three years or so. And maybe this was enough to convince them that they should finally read it.

JOHN: *Well, let me put you on the spot. Neither of us are very heavily into superheroes.*

STEVE: Right.

JOHN: *I still follow an occasional one.*

STEVE: Yeah, me too.

JOHN: *But has this been enough to get you reading Batman again?*

STEVE: Yeah, although not regularly. I should say, though, that I never used to read BATMAN. I mean, I read it as a kid, but I have not read it recently. I read some of the special stuff like DARK KNIGHT, THE KILLING JOKE and things like that. I tried to read THE CULT but I hated it. But I've read the regular BATMAN comics occasionally lately, like maybe half the ones that have come out in the last few months. Of course, there's the other side of all that. I've kind of overdosed on the whole Batman thing. Having this kind of job is like being a bartender in many ways. You've got to listen to people talk about the same things all the time. People come in here and maybe it's the only 20 minutes all week that they get a chance to talk to somebody about comics. So they talk to me about them. And everybody does that. So, eight hours a day I talk about comics. Or at least it feels like that sometimes.

But *absolutely everybody* has wanted to talk about BATMAN, the movie.

JOHN: *So — I might as well ask too! What did you think about the movie?*

STEVE: I thought it had some problems with the plot — particularly from the appearance of the Batwing on. There were some holes in there — such as when the Joker is dragging Vicky Vale up the stairs and the crippled Batman is following. The Joker drops the bell and blocks the stairwell. So how come when you get to the top the Joker's henchmen are up there? How did they get up there? Things like that. They bothered me a little bit in watching the movie but I found myself making an interesting comparison a few weeks later while watching LETHAL WEAPON 2. I enjoyed that movie but

ANIMAL MAN . . . one of Steve's best sellers. Illustration by Gil Kane.

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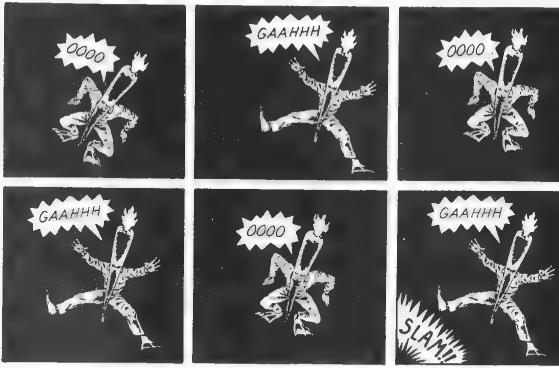
"The feedback on BATMAN has been exceptional."



©1988 Bob Burden

One of Steve's favorite comics: Bob Burden's FLAMING CARROT (from issue #6, 1985).

the plot is full of just ridiculous holes. Thinking about it afterwards, it occurred to me that because BATMAN is a comic-book movie, and because I'm steeped in the lore of comic books, that I probably judged it from a totally different viewpoint and a different standard. I mean, if I applied the same standard to LETHAL WEAPON 2 then I would have totally hated the movie because those plot holes would have bothered me. So maybe the viewing public applies the same standard to LETHAL WEAPON 2 that it does to BATMAN — in which case they wouldn't be aware of all that. And feedback on BATMAN generally has been exceptional.

JOHN: *Frankly I wasn't completely knocked out by it. There were parts of it that I really liked and there were parts of it I really didn't care for. One thing that struck me was, "You know, this guy is walking around dressed as a bat — and it really does look pretty stupid."*

STEVE: Yeah, it does. They tried to deal with that by not focusing a lot on him.

JOHN: *But in that scene where Batman is running down the street with Vicky Vale he looks pretty silly.*

STEVE: Some of the things that made the whole thing patently ridiculous were some of the limitations that the costume imposed on **Michael Keaton**. He could not move his neck. He had to turn his whole body to look at anybody.

JOHN: *You said before, Steve, that you weren't sure what all this BATMAN movie mania is going to mean to comic books down the road.*

STEVE: I hope and I think that this is probably the case when Batman is out, when Batman is to the general public what Bell-bottom jeans are right now (of course, the comics collector has always been insulated from normal people) . . .

JOHN: *I know I am. I don't deal with normal people. That's why I come here.*

STEVE: *(Laughter.)* Right. Anyway, I don't think it's going to be "poop on Batman" as far as regular comic collectors are concerned. Probably sales will drop back to a little better than what they were before all this started. Generally, though, Batman has been a fairly popular character for the last year or two. I don't think a lot of people are going to have a negative concept of Batman.

Now as far as the general public goes, I don't know. They'll probably start ignoring Batman just the way they were before. And people will leave their Batman T-shirts in the backs of their closets.

Hopefully, comics in general will gain some permanent converts.

Stick-Man, another one of Steve's fave comics — 'nuff said!

©1988 Dennis Worden

LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

LOOK MORE CLOSELY FOR COMICS INTERVIEW

Gentlemen:

Something about issue #71 of COMICS INTERVIEW so caught my eye that I purchased it last Friday along with my regular stash of comics and devoured it over the weekend. I find this particularly odd, because I've not seen any of **John Byrne's** work since he returned to Marvel. It was a fun way to catch up on what's been going on in the Marvel Universe since then — though the interview convinced me that I made the right decision in dropping all Marvel mainstream comics shortly before **Byrne** returned.

Anyway, a couple of items in your back issue listings also caught my eye and made me realize I should look more closely for your magazine at my comics shop. Enclosed please find a check to cover the cost of issues #65 and #70 of COMICS INTERVIEW. I have no idea how I missed the WATCHMEN issue in particular, since I'm a big fan of the series. The BATMAN issue also ought to be fun.

David B. Kirby
Apartment 7
1420 S 28th St
Arlington, VA 22206

You should, indeed, look more closely for COMICS INTERVIEW at your comics shop — and, if you don't see it because it's already sold out, please make a point of asking your retailer to order enough copies to go around! (Or, better yet, subscribe.) Anyway, David, you made my day by noting that although you've dropped Marvel, you still found our coverage of Marvel more than worthwhile, which is quite a compliment. You see, we strive to cover the length and breadth of the comics field in such a way that, regardless of whether you're familiar with the people or subject matter, you'll still find the interviews fascinating and informative. And even, on occasion, stimulating enough to prompt you to pick up some of the material under discussion. — *DAK*

WE WANT RICK VEITCH TO COMPLETE HIS WORK ON SWAMP THING

We Want Free Circulation Of Mature Ideas In Comics

In a recent issue of AMAZING HEROES (#164), we were both appalled and shocked to read that, following the rejection of one of his stories because of its religious content by DC Editor-in-Chief **Jenette Kahn, Rick Veitch** had to resign from the series, leaving his carefully built 24-issue saga incomplete.

We are aware of the fact that the censored episode features a character closely reminiscent to Christ in a manner that might shock some readers. However, *reassured by Ms. Kahn herself*, we feel confident that "The subject was handled with integrity and respect." Thus, it is difficult for us to believe her when she says: "As president of DC Comics, I feel a sense of loyalty to our freelance writers and artists. It is they who make us the innovative, vital publishing company that we are." Instead, we think, like **M. Veitch**, that "**(Ms. Kahn's)** decision diminishes mature comics."

To paraphrase **M. Veitch**, we do not believe that anybody, including readers (whose intelligence and tolerance remain to be challenged in this case), "have the moral right to dictate what may be thought about, written about or published for the rest of us."

We remain confident that, if **Ms. Kahn** would agree to reconsider her decision, **Rick Veitch** (as he himself publicly stated) and herself would find a way to make this story mutually satisfactory.

To whom it may concern, we'd like to remind that **Rick Veitch** had, up to this point, accomplished the rare — if not unique — feat of taking a higly praised series from the hands of one of the true comic geniuses of our time (**Alan Moore**) and still keeping it at a comparable level of excellence. On the other hand, we'd like to take this opportunity to salute **Jenette Kahn** and her staff whose previous clairevoyance has made it possible for so many talents to express themselves freely under the "DC" imprint.

Therefore, with deep respect for both parties concerned, we, **Jérôme Pirouë**, owner of the bookshop "Au Paradoxe Perdu" in Geneva, Switzerland, and the faithful readers of SWAMP THING, as well as sympathisers in this cause, hereby demand that "DC" and **Jenette Kahn** publish **Rick Veitch's** story and allow him to complete his brilliant saga.

Ms. Kahn, the eyes of future comics historians are upon you, as well as our mostest signatures.

The petitioners

Name/First name	Address	Age	Nat.	Religious Connection	Signature
PIROUÉ JÉRÔME	10, Rte de Chêne Geneva	29	USA	Roman Cath	
PELLEGRINO DANIEL	3, Rue Bautini	12	ITALIE	Catholic	
DAVID HUGH	67, Rte de Malagny, Mme	18	UK	Roman (RCD)	
Hjorv Karen	6, Thalberg	16	Canada	—	
PHILIPPE BADTER	1 ch des Bruyères Cour	26	Français	—	
[illegible]	8 rue de st Julien	15	Italie	Catholique	
Verbra Marc-André	18 P. Rampe Pachet Geneva	21	Italie	—	
[illegible]	[illegible]	58	Jusse	—	
Rey Philippe	47 Fetpels 1222 Cologny	22	Suisse	—	
Yves BARRELET	10 Rue ROSELET 1203 GENEVE	20	Suisse	Cath. Romain	
Philippe CARCELLER	13 rue Charles-P. [illegible]	19	Suisse	—	
Thomas Jude	7 Rue de la Ferme	33	SUISSE	Cath-Rom	

EXCELLENT (AND ACCURATE) COVERAGE

Dear Darrel:

Just a quick note to say thanks for the excellent coverage in COMICS INTERVIEW #70 recently. Not only was it an all-around interesting issue, but the exposure for the new DC HEROES game is really appreciated.

As I'm sure you know, in our respective industries it's a too-infrequent experience to be accurately quoted in any published literature; I think your article captured the lighthearted nature of our discussion and did a fine job covering the topics you and I both wanted to address. (I also certainly can't complain about being in the company of **Hamm, Englehart,** and **Kane,** to name a few.)

In conclusion, congratulations on a fine article and an entertaining, informative issue — one which is selling like hotcakes in the comics stores around Los Angeles (my wife says it must be our interview . . . still, it might have something to do with the batguy).

Thomas Cook
1232 Berkeley Drive
Glendale, CA 91205

Thanks for the nice words! We always strive for accuracy here at COMICS INTERVIEW — it may mean a bit more work and attentiveness, but we think it's worth it.

You should take a bow yourself, Tom. The new DC HEROES game is certainly something to take pride in. In fact, all of Mayfair's products seem to be very well designed and thoroughly enjoyable, and I'm sure that's no accident.

And don't be so quick to dismiss your wife's assessment. Look at it this way, the batguy had his mug splattered across every mag, but only COMICS INTERVIEW had our lighthearted but informative discussion! (And when you are a famous Hollywood mogul we'll be able to say we knew you when, and charge a fortune for the back issue.)

— Darrel L. Boatz

WISHES BATMAN COMICS WERE GOOD ENOUGH TO WITHSTAND SCRUTINY

Dear Cl-tizens,

This is the first time I have felt compelled to write to COMICS INTERVIEW, so please, be gentle with me! (I'm not used to this letter-writing business, anyway).

The main reason I'm writing is to congratulate you on a thoroughly entertaining 70th issue. I have bought only a few issues of CI over the years. I tend to pick up those with interviewees I am particularly interested in, like **Gardner Fox** in #9 and **Beau Smith** in #23 and the more recent **Jerry Robinson** and **Roy Thomas** issues. Issue #70 was, of course, irresistable, with true heroes **Dick Sprang, Bob Kane** and **Steve Englehart** in the spotlight. I was expecting some fascinating talk and I got it! Your interviewers, **Jeff Gelb** and **Lou Mougin,** apart from being among the luckiest people on Earth to be able to talk with these greats, set a nice, conversational tone straight away and add greatly to the enjoyment of the interviews. (I just thought this was a point worth making. It doesn't seem to be given enough attention.) The comments of **Dick Sprang** were worth the price of the book alone. **Sprang** is one of those few people in comics I feel I owe a huge debt to, so much did they add to my formative years. As a youngster, I always sought out **Sprang's** issues of BATMAN, DETECTIVE and WORLD'S FINEST more keenly than any others. His art had a quality all its own, one I find it impossible to quantify or describe. Even now, I treasure the **Sprang** issues of the Batman titles more than any others. I was, naturally, delighted with Dick's recent pages in TEC and the HISTORY OF THE DC UNIVERSE book. Is there any news on the possibility of his illustrating a full story soon?

My pleasure at such a lengthy interview with **Bob Kane** was somewhat diluted by an unpleasant "atmosphere" to **Kane's** words. I know it would be wrong to judge a person on the basis of a written piece like this, but I couldn't shake the impression that **Kane's** ego is getting the better of him. Some of his comments were either extremely self-aggrandising or simply open to misinterpretation. Nevertheless, the historical insights were fascinating.

The notorious war of words between **Steve Englehart** and **Mike Barr** in CBG has left me more than a little perplexed, so I was looking forward to Steve's further comments on the matter. It's difficult to be totally objective about this, since I have strong feelings for both Steve's and **Denny O'Neil's** versions of Batman and the Joker. What Steve said here seemed perfectly in order, although I would hesitate to give full support to his contention that Denny's Joker wasn't truly a maniac. I think both were one short of a six-pack and the distinction between the forms their madness took is a shaky one at best. Certainly Steve's Joker, with the laughing fish and all, was more OVERTLY insane, but I think we'll have to settle for no clear answer on the debate. So I hope Steve and Mike can shake hands and agree to disagree.

Here in Britain, we won't be seeing the BATMAN movie until August. I have been convinced, by the trailer and all the stills and comments, that it is going to be the *right* treatment, at long last. I understand it is breaking all records in the States and, obviously, I'm pleased that Batman is getting all this publicity. I just wish, though, that the comics were consistently good enough to stand the increased public scrutiny they are now receiving. I would hate for the comic to be judged on the "Death in the Family" issues. The **Grant/Breyfogle** DETECTIVE is excellent and should impress any non-committed reader, but the BATMAN title itself is too inconsistent. Why, oh why, couldn't the attention currently being lavished on Batman in all the media, have come durning the outstanding **Doug Moench** period? It is my opinion that **Moench's** three years of Batman in BATMAN and DETECTIVE COMICS represent the *best* the character has been in all his fifty years. Trade paperback collections of those stories would *really* be justified! Further, I feel that a lot of the seemingly confused efforts to realign Batman's history and instill fresh interest in the character stem from DC's mistake in losing **Moench** as a writer. **Moench's** Batman might one day be equalled, but I doubt if it will ever be surpassed.

This letter is obviously getting out of control. I didn't intend to go on for so long, so I'll close by asking if you have any plans to do interviews with comics fans again, as you did in the earlier issues. I may have missed some, but seeing **Guy Lillian's** letter this issue got me thinking that an interview with him would be as fascinating as anything CI has done to date. My interest in the '60s and early fandom would be well rewarded by interviews with Guy and people like **T.E. Pouncey, Rich Morrissy** and/or **Paul Gambaccini.**

Thanks again for a great read. Dare I say, keep up the good work?

Dale Coe
56, Whitecross Road
Warrington
Cheshire, WA5 1LR
England

Go ahead, Dale, dare to say — after all, we dare to do it! And, no, we haven't dispensed with our "Fan in the Street" feature, it's just that space has been tight and something (including letters, at times) has to get squeezed out to make room for those feature-length interviews we've become so expert at doing so much better than the competition. But the "Fan in the Street" will be back — maybe even this issue — in the form of a fun interview with Joel Thingvall.

— DAK

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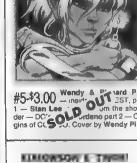

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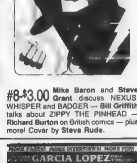

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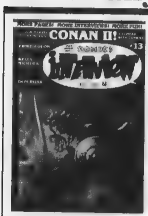

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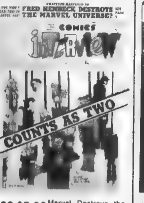

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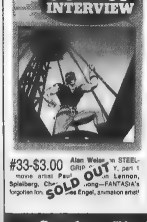

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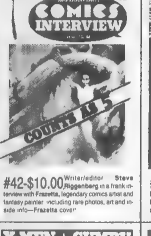

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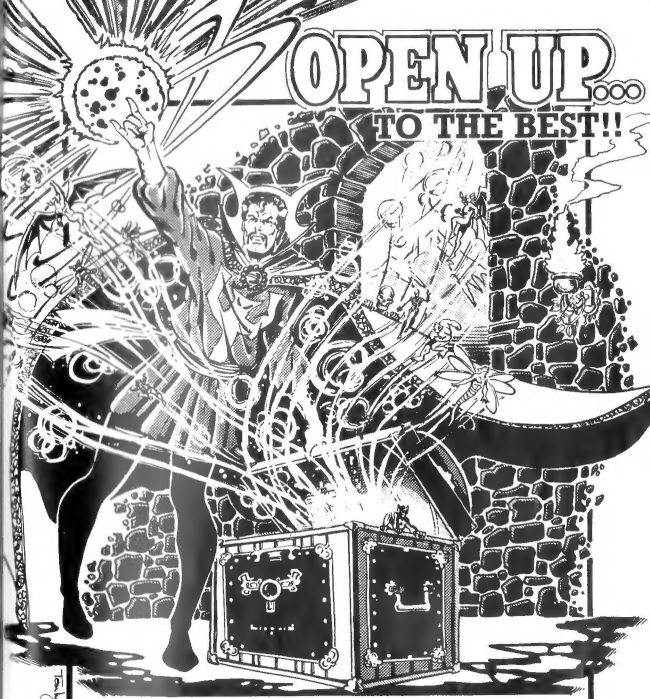

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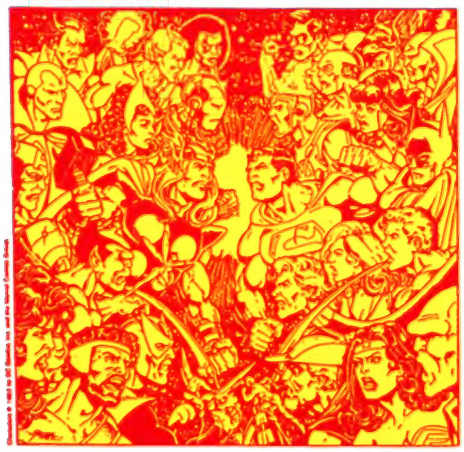

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